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SPECIAL ISSUE
TV NATION

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Kevin Garnett's Life
in the NBA



Roseanne

BAD MOOD RISING

By Celia Farber

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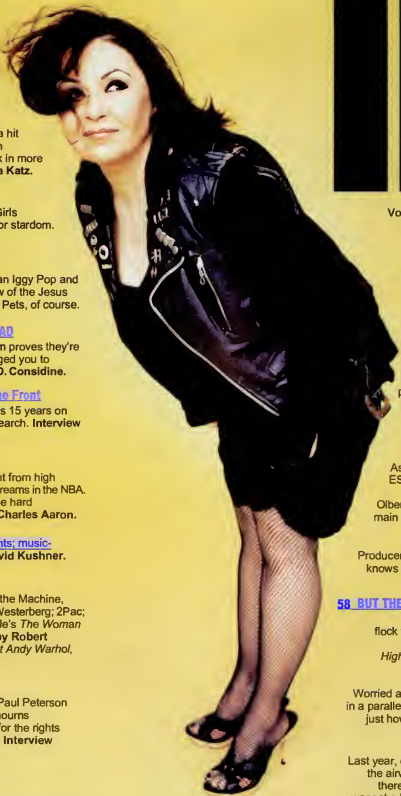
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SPIN

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TALESPINNERS



"Meeting Roseanne was like being pushed through a glass wall," says Staff Writer Cella Farber, right, who interviewed television's queen diva for this month's cover article. "It was just a shattering awakening about the female condition that I had somehow suppressed my entire life." Farber, who'd never followed Roseanne that closely before, now counts herself among the converted. "I don't care who or what she spits on. I adore her."



David Yow's manic stage antics with his band the Jesus Lizard on last year's Lollapalooza tour were the stuff of indie-rock legend. Who better, then, to interview Iggy Pop, rock's reigning id? "I get compared to him a lot but I don't have nearly the musical drive that

he has," says Yow, above. "He's really committed." The Jesus Lizard's new album, *Shot*, is out this month.

Mark Schone, right, readily admits that he had his biases when he set out to report on the rise and fall of TV talk shows. "I thought they were the TV equivalent of public hangings." But his opinion quickly changed after sitting in with some talk-show studio audiences. "The people on these shows *know* they're being exploited. As long as they're getting their two minutes of fame they're fine with it." Schone is SPIN's newest senior contributing writer.



This month's pictures of Radiohead mark British photographer Rankin's first appearance in a U.S. magazine.

"My work is very concept-oriented and U.S. publications give you the freedom to do that. Brits tend to be a bit more arrogant." Rankin, left, also publishes the U.K. magazine *Dazed & Confused*.



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by Jonathan Bernstein

The Making of Americans

Television, in all its dumb, garish glory, says more about us as a culture than we'd probably care to admit.

Why would a culturally alert magazine like *SPIN* devote the majority of an issue to celebrate what is, in essence, America's Enemy Within? Television is, after all, the root of all evil. Individuals of wildly divergent convictions—psychologists, politicians, parents, educators, firebrand film directors, and op-ed fulminators—can all find common ground when it comes to using television as a catchall punching bag. Societal violence, sharp declines in literacy, and the dissolution of the family unit can all be directly attributed to the pernicious influence of television. TV makes you fat, rots your brain, and turns you into a passive, pale-skinned, slack-jawed vegetable.

And one more thing: American television is the best in the world. Believe me: I was born and bred on British broadcasting, the self-proclaimed finest on the globe. But take *Prime Suspect* and *Pride and Prejudice* out of the equation, and you're faced with wall-to-wall game shows, variety hours, and soap operas—in *prime time*! As mass-media entertainment goes, TV is what America does best. But don't take my word for it; go to Broadway, B. Dalton, or Blockbuster and see how the big hits from these mediums stack up against the Nielsen Top 10. Better still, check out your multiplex: Is it showing a cop movie as complex as *Homicide*, a comedy as rich as *Seinfeld*, a chiller as spooky as *The X-Files*, a teen-pic as involving as *Party of Five*, a courtroom drama as gripping as *Murder One*, or an animated feature as sharp as *The Simpsons*? Does it boast instant, out-of-nowhere phenomena like *ER* and *Friends*? More to the point, is anyone actually taking chances in the way a performer like Roseanne used her ratings-grabbing show as a platform for views that, in some circles, border on the seditious?

For many Americans, though, TV is a dirty little secret, a guilty pleasure, and they feel an innate need to be punished for their indulgence. Like rock and hip-hop, the small screen is, come



TV Nation: It'll suck you in (special section begins on page 42).

election time, regularly seized as an easy target by office-seeking opportunists attempting to exploit the guilt and fears of would-be constituents. Like rock and hip-hop, TV has few impassioned supporters, which is why legislation hurls through Congress unopposed and the ridiculous V-chip becomes the last parental refuge against the tide of violence threatening to engulf Imperiled offspring. (How long before some conscience-free cynic with an eye for a fast buck starts patrolling schoolyards, tempting gore-starved kids with a secret decoder?)

It's also why William Bennett can deploy the might of his sketchily defined Empower America to expunge the virus of daytime talk shows from our screens. The concerted exploitation of a freakish underclass for the purulent interest of their baying peers is surely TV at its most indefensible. Or maybe it's the sole means of expression available to a section of America that would otherwise remain shuttered from view. (And anyway, aren't tantrums, crack-ups, fistfights, and teary-eyed confessions the reasons people go to Hole shows?)

On the reverse side of the coin from Jerry Montel and Ricki's massed flanks of stretch pants and doomed perms is the bluish-free dreamland presided over by Aaron Spelling. For close to three decades, this courtly, snow-thatched Texan has peppered the screen with sun-kissed fantasies of the rich and giggling, rarely wavering from his just-add-blondes-and-bring-to-bill formula. A similarly sunny assembly line is currently filling Saturday mornings with silken-haired, honey-thighed California cuties shaking their booty on such strange, saccharine morality tales as *Saved by the Bell*, *California Dreams*, and *Sweet Valley High*.

So, is the point of this issue that TV rules or TV sucks? Neither. Or both. It rules and sucks. It panders to the lowest common denominator, but its most popular programming is often its most intelligent. It's intended to be trivial and quickly forgotten but its effect is narcotic. It's a babysitter, a best friend, and background noise. It's your national pastime—accept it, revel in it, celebrate it. America is TV Nation. •

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POINTBLANK

Letters



THE MAN IN BLACK

I don't think I've ever been so impressed with an interview and a personality as I was while reading Eric Weisbard's piece on Trent Reznor in the February SPIN ["Sympathy for the Devil"]. Weisbard's exploration of Reznor's experience and talent lent me an entirely new respect for him as a musician and a human being. Thanks for peeling away the layers of my ignorance and exposing me to a whole new world of music.

KIMBERLY J. SINGER
MIDDLETOWN, OHIO

The lyrics to NIN's "Big Man With a Gun" have always made me sick, but I was hardly consoled by Reznor's explanation of the song: "I've been taken out of context, and

it's ridiculous." I wish Trent had enlightened us on how we should interpret the lyrics "Got me a big old dick / And I like to have fun / Held against your forehead / I'll make you suck it." Are we to believe there's some deeper meaning to that?

BRITT RUSERT
TOWHAWANDA, NEW YORK

Finally, an article on Trent Reznor that makes me feel like I've been left with a piece of his mind rather than the bias of some journalist who is out to make Trent look like this evil, angry musician.

LORI DECKER
MACOMB, ILLINOIS

BAD HAIR DAZE

It's obvious that when it comes to rock'n'roll, Sebastian Bach still doesn't get it ["Hair Today, Gone Tomorrow," February]. He refers to the legions of laughable hair bands as "rockers" and dismisses alternative bands as "nerds" and jealous "college people." Jealous? Of what?

MIKE TOUKATLY
CLINTON, NEW YORK

Gee, I sure am glad that Sebastian Bach has learned the hard lessons of life—that material success can be fleeting, and to survive, one must roll with the punches. But I'm sure if he could magically relive his glory days, he would be the same

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SPINAUTHORS

Jack Healey, executive director of the Human Rights Action Center, who wrote February's Topspin about Nigerian dissident Ken Saro-Wiwa, was presented a Martin Luther King, Jr., award for human rights by the House of Blues in January. Also honored were the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh—a Vietnamese monk who was chairman of the Vietnamese Buddhist Peace Delegation during the Vietnam War—and singer Lou Rawls.

theatrical, womanizing pig who metal fans idolized during the '80s.

KARA BETH STINSON
ISOWVILLE, KENTUCKY

A TOUCH OF EVIL

These people masquerading as pagans obviously don't even know the history of their own people ["Satan's Cheerleaders," February]. Eighty-five percent of the Norse people were peaceful farmers and tradesmen—the Viking warriors were a minority, albeit a highly visible one. Their claim to be going back to the "old ways" through Satanism is a thin veil for their sickness. It's people like these who give true pagans a bad name.

CAILE DONACHAIDH KANE
HAMDEN, NEW YORK

As I neared the end of "Satan's Cheerleaders," I was expecting (and hoping for) some kind of commentary on the vulgarities that I had just read. Instead, I found a sorry attempt at making a joke of the horrifying events and inhumane antics contained in the piece. Perhaps Darcey Steinke will have a greater sense of purpose in her future articles.

DINA CARPENTR
VIA INTERNET

RAW POLL

What's up with ridiculing Green Day? [Readers Poll, February] Is this not the very same band that, just two short years ago, inspired your readers to buy "Dookie" and dye their grunge-cut hair green? Maybe if Billie Joe blew his head off, Green Day would be cool again.

JESSICA CALLIS
PHOENIX, ARIZONA

A quick rundown of the Readers Poll "Voice of Our Generation" list: A guy who committed suicide, nobody, a guy who wants to commit suicide, a bunch of kids who mimic these people, and a chick who tried to commit suicide. If these are the voices of our generation, I don't want to be a part of it.

JACKIE HOUGHTON
LINDSAY, ONTARIO, CANADA

WHAT'S THE STORY?

I thought it was kind of funny that you would print an article about the demise of sexist heavy-metal rock stars, and then, in the same issue, run a profile of a suck-ass rock-star band like Oasis who seem to really enjoy all the old clichés of getting rich and screwing groupies ["Beat the Beatles," February]. Isn't that the attitude that made us all hate the big-hair bands in the first place?

BRYAN E. LEED
DAYTON, OHIO

ANIMAL ATTRACTION

Marilyn Manson says there isn't anything sexy about his band for girls to attach themselves to ["Scary Monster," February]. Well, I don't know about other girls, but this 25-year-old woman finds Mr. Manson and his music incredibly sexy. Oh, and I can't sleep without a light on, either.

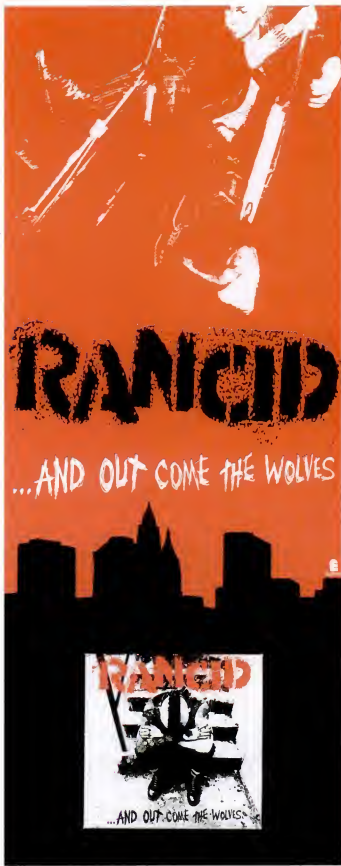
LORI ANN MOSKWA
ALLEN PARK, MICHIGAN

SEX CRIMES

Regarding the AIDS sex police article ["Words From the Front," February]: Why is it reactionary to discourage bathhouse orgies, especially considering that the baths were once a breeding ground for AIDS and that many people were infected, became ill, and died before the methods of transmission were even understood? It would seem an act of genocide, as well as greed, to reopen the baths now.

DAVE HIPPO
PUYALLUP, WASHINGTON

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*Would you give these men a
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EXPOSURE

Ivory Power

The Ben Folds Five is bursting bubbles with its piano pop.

BRUCE "THE BOSS" Springsteen. Ted "the Wild Man" Nugent. Rod "the Bod" Stewart. Rock'n'roll likes christening its favorite sons with names that immortalize their lunacy, their thunder, and their soaring sperm counts. But what do you call a skinny pianist who wears black socks with his Keds and speaks reverently of *The Lion King* soundtrack? How about Ben "the Geek" Folds? "I hate to admit it," draws the 27-year-old Chapel Hill, North Carolina, popsmith, "but I think that's what they're calling me."

If Folds is a geek, it's only because he's an oddity: a trained musician who lives to rock. The frontman of the Ben Folds Five drops Gershwin licks into his solos and weaves Fats Waller and baroque into a repertoire that merges the smarty-pants pop of Squeeze with the punctilious prog-R&B of Queen. In an indie climate that exalts amateurism and equates chops with, well, geekiness, Folds's virtuosity comes off like a subversive act. "What we're doing is rebellious," he admits, "because it takes guts to say, 'Well, actually, I can play my instrument.'"

For a time it seemed his talent might damn Folds to a life in session-musician oblivion. He blushes when he recalls the brush with studio work in Nashville ("I even played drums on Christian-rock records") and the eight months in New York arranging music for an off-Broadway version of "The Buddy Holly Story" that eventually drove him back to the musical greenhouse of Chapel Hill. It was there that Folds sought out a couple of old friends—bassist Robert Sledge and drummer Darren Jessee—and the Ben Folds Five (all three of them) was born.

Together, the Five struck a musical accord between Folds's brainy, airtight compositions and his knack for hip-shaking spontaneity. The formula comes together on heavy showtunes like "Underground," a punk "Bohemian Rhapsody" that tugs at the very nipple rings of the sacrosanct Alternative Nation: "We'll be decked in all black," Folds croons to a loopy Supremes stomp, "Slammin' the pit fantastic / Officer Friendly's little boy's got a mohawk!"

Balting indie audiences with his flashy technique and acerbic wit has earned him his share of detractors, but Folds doesn't seem to mind. "If historians look back and blame us for dismantling the alternative genre," Folds says with a grim twinkle, "I wouldn't be ashamed of that at all."

JEFFREY ROTTER

MICHAEL LEWELLEN

The Common Max

Actor Max Perlich has made a career out of being just a regular guy.

"I'M IN A lot of pain right now," says Max Perlich, who's nursing a recent root canal, "so I don't know if I'm coming across or not." It might be cruel, but such everyday agony seems to suit Perlich. Even though he is the inarticulate, working-class movie-schleb-of-the-moment, Perlich just doesn't look like an actor—he looks like someone standing behind you at the DMV. His raw nerdiness has brought him a healthy buzz ever since his weaselly meth-head in *Drugstore Cowboy*; but Perlich may have finally come into his last year as Jennifer Jason Leigh's dim, cruelly polite fan/husband in *Georgia*, one of 1995's best, and least calculated, supporting performances.

Cleveland-born (his parents moved to L.A. when he was five) and completely untrained ("I feel like you should be able to obtain all the information on your own. I don't feel like you should have to pay anyone for that"), Perlich is suddenly working at a relay-race clip after 11 years of acting. This year, along with the recent *Beautiful Girls*, Perlich is coming up with *Feeling Mimesota*, *The Grave*, *Homeward Bound II*, and the woefully titled *Livers Ain't Cheap*. "I don't think I'm that great, so I don't think I'm in the position to turn stuff down." His ubiquity has made him a frontman of the new geek chic, down to his linkage to Beanie Boy Adam Horowitz. Perlich's costar in the sprint-to-video *Lost Angels*: "I'm just a friend. We turn each other on to different types of music. Music is important, to let it move you in your life, you know? I had a great relationship with Matt Dillon when we were filming *Beautiful Girls* because we both collect 78s of stuff like Stan Kenton and Dizzy Gillespie."

If Perlich seems to be the sole inhabitant of his fiercely anti-glam-actor niche, it's because he's not shitting around. Just like his character in *Georgia*, Perlich is dead earnest, and, likewise, an enthralled motorhead. "I've been working on these Chevroys that I started buying. I got a '39 Coupe and a '50 Coupe Deluxe, and a '58 Ford Fairlane that's all custom and that's about an inch off the ground. I work on the motors; I haven't applied myself to body work yet."

MICHAEL ATKINSON

Max Perlich
steps up
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Odd Spice Swedish rockers Salt pour on the noise with some crazy rhythms.

SWEDISH HARD-ROCKERS SALT have their own stubborn idea of performance etiquette. At the close of a brief but frenzied set at London's Dublin Castle, vocalist/guitarist Nina Ramsby addresses the audience for the first (and only) time with a curt "We are Salt. This is our last song. And we don't play encores."

The following morning finds them a little more talkative, if still slightly reclusive. Ramsby, drummer Jim Tegman, and bassist Daniel Ewerman are lazing on their hotel-room beds, explaining in their best broken English the origins of their disturbingly powerful debut, *Auscultate*. A hybrid of experimentation and pop fury, the album's points of origin are hard to pin down: On "Bluster," metal riffing pile-drives into flowing-pop choruses, while on "So,"

doleful acoustic guitars buffet broken rhythms.

Salt almost sound like a band without a country.

"We're outsiders in Sweden," says Ewerman. "There

are hardcore and pop bands there, but no one else is playing the same style we are. Many people say we play schizophrenic music." Ewerman pauses to consider his words. "Perhaps we are schizophrenic, but we never thought it was strange until people started to mention it. We just thought we were doing nice songs."

Formed three years ago at a Stockholm art school, the trio took up residence on an unheated houseboat near Stockholm. After playing a string of all-night parties for friends, Salt attracted the attention of a local American-owned radio station, and soon their scalding first single, "Bluster," was garnering fans and heavy A&R interest. "It was a special atmosphere then," recalls Ewerman. "The houseboat had small rooms with red-velour walls, which we thought was really strange. Then we found out it used to be a bordello. Eventually the landlord threw us out for being too noisy."

Noisiness is not a typical trait of the Swedish, and outside of their music, the stereotype holds true for Salt. Still, the band is slowly absorbing more American ways. "*Extroverti* is a bad word in Swedish," explains Ewerman. "But this sound engineer from Texas taught me a good phrase to use when I need a rest room there—'Could I go and push Mr. Brown in the pool?' I used that in a bar and they seemed surprised, but they still wouldn't let me use the toilet."

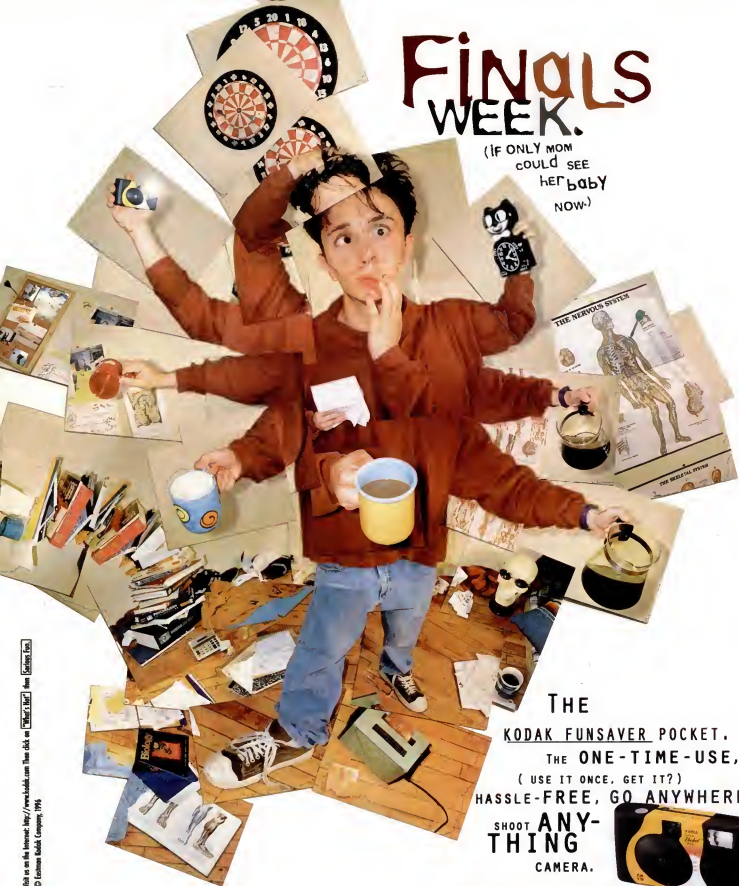
KEN MICALLEF



Pillars of Salt: from left, Jim Tegman, Daniel Ewerman, and Nina Ramsby.

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Lords of the New Church

ANY GRANT NOTWITHSTANDING, Christian Contemporary Music long seemed content to remain politely irrelevant. But lately, CCM has crusaded into the Alternative Nation with a righteous vengeance, leaving the Devil with nothing but Norwegian death metal and Bryan Adams to call his own. Here, a breakdown of the new prophets of the altar alternative. KEITH BLANCHARD

GRAMMATRAIN

Genesis

Miraculously transformed the water of a garage-grunge demo into the wine of a six-album deal.

Prophets

Slackerish twenty-something trio of credible sinners—the drummer even has a bona fide illegitimate daughter

Acts

Proclaimed their grunge cred with "Undivine Election," a Kurt Cobain tribute that lambastes unchristian Christians for their "he-had-it-coming" snootiness

Psalms

Surely the only band in Christian rock to claim as influences Pink Floyd, Rush, and notorious devil-worshipping back-maskers Led Zeppelin.

Revelation

Visceral attacks on pro-choice advocates and drunk drivers

Unardonable Sin

Named the band for their late granny, who raised the three brothers until "Gramma's Train" came for her at last.

The Good Word

Nirvana without the pain; Soundgarden without the point.

JARS OF GLAY

While still in college, this group won a Gospel Music Association competition with Oval-strumming simplicity

Meek as lambs: The title of their demo CD, *Faith*, says it all.

Hired Adrian Belew, sideman of biblical double-headed Peter Gabriel and Paul Simon, did a nationwide tour of churches and civic centers, the Christian equivalent of the debar circuit.

Progressive but unplugged alt-folk, spiced with whining violins and the occasional Gregorian chant.

Lyrics betray a disturbingly erotic attachment to you-know-who: "I am on my knees / To love you / Take my world apart..."

First concert the band members attended included Air Supply, Donny & Marie, and aesthetic Antichrist Juice Newton.

If this band were a schoolboy, it would have the living crap beat out of it every day after class.

AUDIO ADRENALINE

Met five years ago at a Bible Belt college; have been trying to lead their patient flock to the Promised Land ever since.

A quartet of sunny disciples doing one long infernal for salvation.

Single "We're a Band!" was added to video-tapes at Hard Rock Cafés worldwide, and can now be seen wherever overpriced, shoot-me-I'm-a-tourist merchandise is sold.

Classic, guitar-powered alterna-hymns: fun, but only in moderation.

The song titles—"Walk on Water," "Man of God," "I Hear Jesus Calling"—tell the Greatest Story Ever Told.

Live album features kiddie anthem "If You're Happy and You Know It (Clap Your Hands)." Or rather, "Bang Your Head!," their not-quite-inspired revision.

"Never Gonna Be as Big as Big as Jesus," their signature cut, is an understatement on the order of "Never Gonna Be as Sexually Experienced as Witt Chamberlain."

DC TALK

DC Talk (originally District of Columbia; retrofitted to Decent Christian) met at Jerry Falwell's Liberty University.

Bassist is one of the few black guys in Christian rock. Lead singer is a live ringer for Kurt Cobain.

Compare: Jesus fed 5,000 on five loaves and two fishes; DC Talk fed 4,000 youth pastors teaser cassettes and \$1-off coupons to hype the new album.

Post-apocalyptic grunge and anger-free white rap, grafted onto deep hip-hop roots.

Some hard-core proselytizing, but diluted by genuine angst: "Is this one for the people? / Is this one for the Lord? / Or do I simply serenade for things I must afford?"

Recently ended a concert with a cover of Nirvana's "All Apologies," rewriting "everyone is gay" line as "Jesus is the way."

The flagship of the Christian armada. May a plague of lozies strike he who keepeth "Jesus Freak" from the Buzz Bin.

HEAVY ROTATION

Staff Selections



GIANT SAND, *Barbaree Broadcast* (Koch International, 2 Tri-Harbor Court, Port Washington, NY 11050) For more than a decade, Giant Sand has flown under almost

everyone's radar. Let's end that streak with this record, where Hawaiian slack-key guitar dovetails with Carter Family ballads in a front-porch jam session held a couple of hoozas down. Put the kettle on, wonda on how the singing members wordlessly with the whistle of boiling water, and start your Sunday right. (Beason)

CHET ATKINS, *Picks on the Beatles* (RCA Victor) The Fab Four have weathered some pretty unfavorable reinterpretations: Manson, Broadway, the Bee Gees. Luckily, Chet Atkins isn't one of those. In 1966, with George Harrison's blessing, the Nashville guitar polymath restrung a dozen Northern Songs in the dulcet style that made him axman to the King. The real miracle here is that the Beatles' songs can survive such radical remodeling. Could the brothers Galtagher make the same boast? I don't think so. (Rotter)



VAMPIROS LESBOS, *Sexualized Dance Party* (Motel, 210 E. 49th St., New York, NY 10017) Manfred Hubler & Siegfried Schwab, the German masters (okay, the only purveyors) of the "horrotica" film-music genre, freak out on this

soundtrack compilation from three of Spanish director Jess Franco's 150 smutty 'n' gore flicks. A shotgun wedding of Emilio Moriconi spaghetti-Western and Davie Allan biker-movie scores (heavy on fuzz guitar and sitar), these 14 tracks make the perfect backdrop for your next black-light party or blood orgy. (Fields)

MONEY MARK, *Mark's Keyboard Repair* (Mo'Wax/frr) As the unofficial fourth Beastie, Money Mark was the man behind the jazzy guitar and fat Hammond organ lines on the last two Beastie Boys records. Now, on his first solo album, Mark takes a B-Boys extended jam, *1015 or more* Moog, kazooes, and wah-wah while subtracting the klisché, the Buddhist monks, and all the damn yapping. You're left feeling that much closer to Superfly. (Naparstek)



TRANSAM, *TransAm* (Thrill Jockey, P.O. Box 476794, Chicago, IL 60647) TransAm sound like the kind of guys who spend their formative years wearing out King Crimson records. On their debut, these four Maryland youths

unearth the hidden groove in prog rock and rework it as a surf instrumental. The payoff is garage-land ambient with plenty of pickup. (Smith)

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Captain's Cream Soda

True Grit Lo-fi sons of Memphis, the Grifters have a thing for getting down and dirty.

"MUSIC'S THE LINK that holds Memphis together," says Grifters singer/guitarist Scott Taylor. "We're all just reincarnations of people who have gone before us." Taylor is the Grifter most likely to spend a late night checking out a local fi-fi-and-drum band, or drive you around Memphis detailing the forces that shaped the town in which he grew up. The rest of the Grifters are cagier about their hometown loyalties, and more likely to go on about Faust or Gong than the glorious legacy of Sun and Stax. "I don't think we're about being from Memphis," says bassist Tripp Lamkins. "The only definite connection we have with the blues is that a lot of our songs are written from actual depression." Adds guitarist Dave Shouse, "We don't practice voodoo or anything."

If the Grifters don't practice voodoo, it's only because on *Ain't My Lookout*, their fourth full-length album (and first for Sub Pop), they've perfected the blend of Southern-indie hoodoo they do so well. Some

of the Grifters' earlier records were so lo-fi that they offered the sort of primal pleasure you might get from gargling with salt water. *Lookout* is cleaner, but not too clean; if the fidelity is greater than before, it's only to better let you hear how dirty this band really is. Songs like "Covered With Flies," "Parting Shot," and "Return to Cinder" are convincingly swampy constructions of grooves, moans, and bluesy bent-notes. "We're living in a region where a lot of people are fucking," explains Lamkins. "You've got to be able to fuck to it—if you can't fuck to it, then your album sucks."

Formed seven years ago, the Grifters have been playing music to fornicate to far longer than your average Sub Pop rookie. But Memphis is a town that respects age and experience, and the Grifters value that. "Ninety-nine percent of indie music sucks," says Shouse. "For a lot of these bands, Sonic Youth is the earliest band they know. There's no feeling there."

Of course, these guys have a pretty snarky idea of what constitutes feeling. Explaining how he knew that "Boho/Alt," one of the album's standouts, was Grifter-worthy, Shouse says, "I knew it was a Grifters song because I knew we could fuck it up." **JEFF SALAMON**

Down in front, clockwise from top right, Dave Shouse, Tripp Lamkins, Scott Taylor, and Stan Gallimore.

VALERIE PHILLIPS

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Orchestral Maneuvers

Tracy Bonham was headed for the symphony until she discovered guitar. Now she's the new breed of Boston pop.

A FEW THINGS you might need to know about Tracy Bonham, but didn't know you should ask: She is not related to the late Led Zepppelin drummer. She is the one who sings "Mother Mother," the song that starts out with a dusky acoustic guitar, and ends up being an adult-child's rant for independence. She is a native of Eugene, Oregon, where her music-teacher mother taught her three chords on the guitar and how to sing. When she was nine, Bonham took up the violin, and after practicing four hours a day for most of her adolescent life, she attended the University of Southern California on a full scholarship. "I dreamed of going to join the Boston Symphony Orchestra," she recalls. "I had it all planned."

But at USC, Bonham got more attention for her singing than for playing the violin, and guitars started to look good to her. "I really thought I was disturbed," she admits. On a whim, she traveled to Boston to study voice at the Berklee College of Music. She began to write songs, and her early gigs found her playing one bar chord on her new guitar (she'd forgotten the three chords her mother taught her). "I was so happy with this bar chord because you can play it up and down the neck and write a whole song on it," she says.

All of which leads us to Bonham's first major release, *The Burdens of Being Upright*, a quirky, cocky collection that can echo Liz Phair's less lucid moments as often as it can sound like Phair restructured by classically trained aliens. The swirling, punch-drunk "Navy Bean," the queasy "Brain Crack," and "The One," a melodic stomper, all have bits so catchy they're tattooed on your inner soundtrack after one listen, but they muddle chaotically in a structure more classical than pop. Bonham's violin is there, too, though she's wary of overkill. "It sounds dynamic and fiery, but it's supposed to be special. I don't want to treat it like a guitar."

A few other facts: Tracy can play "Kum Ba Yah" on the recorder. She moves once a year and misses her boyfriend when she goes on the road. To entertain herself while touring, she learns bar chords and writes in her journal, but she doesn't read. "Reading in the bus makes me car-sick," she says. Perhaps that's a little more information than you needed. **SUZANNE COLON**





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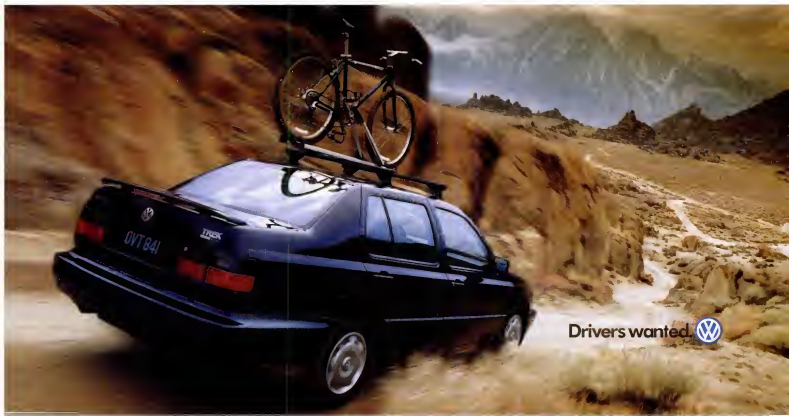
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Drivers wanted



COMIX



Louder Than Words

In Peter Kuper's *The System*, the image isn't everything, it's the *only* thing.

ALTERNATIVE-COMICS VETERAN Peter Kuper lets the images do the talking in his wordless new series, *The System*. Noting that in most comics, "the dialogue doesn't actually move the story along," Kuper has dispensed altogether with talk, thought bubbles, and *Blammo!* sound effects in favor of smiley faces, fabricated corporate logos, and a continuous narrative that pans like a Steadicam.

The System silently stalks a diverse set of not-so-random characters through a fictional metropolis's strip joints, boardrooms, and subterranean lairs. In dizzying succession, an angry exec with a cell phone ignores a begging homeless man who instead cops change from a guy in a baseball cap who dashes into a hospital where a TV set shows a newscaster hassling a detective who interviews a reluctant witness who plunges into the subway—which is where, in fact, the series was born.

"The idea for *The System* came from sitting on a downtown train,

just wondering where the other people were going," says Kuper, who integrates his everyday people with garish news stories like the Son of Sam murders and the World Trade Center bombing.

No stranger to darker material, Kuper has drawn graphic novels based on Kafka and helped found *World War 3 Illustrated*, one of the longest-running underground digests still in print. Though *The System* is published by Vertigo Comics, an imprint of mainstream giant DC Comics, WW3's radical bent still informs Kuper's grainy stencil-and-spray-paint artwork. His trademark woodcut effect owes a debt to the European tradition of picture-book social commentary, especially the work of German expressionist George Grosz—a tradition readers in the U.S. may finally be warming to. "This isn't about superheroes and fantasy and pointless lines like, 'I'm punching you now!'" Kuper asserts. "I want to see how far I can stretch iconography, to get at something about our own, real lives." **SAM PRATT**

A Fan's Notes

The guerrilla rock criticism of Camden Joy.

DURING THE LAST few months of 1995, some 150 enigmatic screeds authored by the pseudonymous "Camden Joy" surfaced in diverse parts of New York City. Posted on telephone poles and garbage bins, Joy's tracts displayed a hyperventilating, loose-gasket appreciation of popular culture, written at various times from the autobiographical POV of an addict, a jilted lover, or a music fan who loves too much. Joy begins where Lester Bangs left off, slobbering at his idols' feet in order to construct a more perfect persona. He raves about Pavement ("I am theirs, all theirs") and Yo La Tengo ("Who dares to suggest unto me that Yo La Tengo are not great like Chinese food"); pillories poor Freddy Johnson ("I would crawl through glass to claw your eyes!"), and decries the capitalist "adverbocracy" that inflicts this pop goo upon us.

Normally, such ravings vanish with swift silence into the winds of time. But 22 of these sweetly pathetic broadsides survive as *The Lost Manifestoes of Camden Joy*, as do



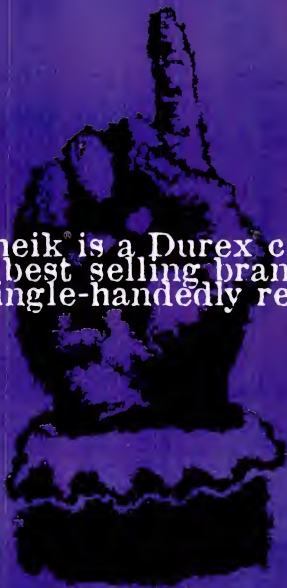
another three "lost" Camden Joy pamphlets: *The Greatest Record Album Ever Told*, *The Greatest Album Singer That Ever Was*, and *The Greatest Record Album Band That Ever Was* (i.e., Frank Black's Teenager of the Year, Al Green, and Creedence Clearwater Revival, respectively, of course).

A mixture of wild analysis and confused boundaries, Joy's rants exhibit a romantic streak wider than Alanis Morissette's leer. Perhaps he defines a new critical beast: the rock critic as stalker (see his upcoming novel, *The Last Rock Star Book* or *Liz Phair: A Rant*). With Camden Joy, it's difficult to ascertain where fantasy begins and where reality enjoys happy hour. **RICHARD GHEHR**

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SOUNDBITES

by Julia Chaplin

• The late reggae great Bob Marley will soon be immortalized in the unlikely environs of a Universal Studios theme park in central Florida. Called "Bob Marley—A Tribute to Freedom," the attraction, set to open in early 1998, will celebrate Marley's legacy with Jamaican food, live reggae bands, and a house and garden patterned after Marley's former residence in Kingston, Jamaica. Marley's widow, Rita, who runs the Bob Marley Foundation and will oversee the attraction, says that "Bob would be have been thrilled" by the park. • Almost a year after Public Enemy's breakup, rapper Chuck D is

striking out on his own with a new rap label called Siam Jamz. Distributed by Columbia Records, the label will concentrate on EPs and singles, a move Chuck D says was inspired by alternative labels like Sub Pop. "Rap and hip-hop are underground forms and need to be treated more like indie rock," says the rapper. • *Chairs I Have Known*, a collection of offbeat compositions by Jac Zinder, the late rock journalist and SPIN contributor, was recently released on Catatonic Records. Sales from the album will go to benefit various charities.



Grunge Redux

Eddie Vedder braved the media horde at the Sundance Film Festival last winter to kick out the jams with local

Seattle band the Fastbacks at a party for the new grunge documentary *Hype!* Vedder is one of the dozens of Rain City pioneers featured in director Doug Pray's film, which features interviews and live footage chronicling the Northwest's golden years. "At first everyone thought the film was the dumbest idea in the world," says Fastbacks lead singer Kim Warnick. "But when they realized it wasn't being shot by some big Hollywood producer, and all their friends were in it, they came around."



Rude Boy Cocker and Jackson at the Brit Awards.

Circus of the Stars

Pulp's Jarvis Cocker rained ridicule on Michael Jackson's parade at the Brit Awards (the U.K. equivalent of the Grammys) last February when he jumped onstage during Jackson's performance and taunted the startled King of Pop with a series of crude and unusual gestures. Jackson, there to accept a lifetime-achievement award, hung haplessly from a 30-foot crane while a panic broke out, in which three of the children Jackson had invited to perform with him were injured. Epic Records, on Jackson's behalf, called Cocker's behavior "disgusting and cowardly" and accused the singer of assaulting the children. Cocker, who denies the allegations and is considering suing for defamation, says, "All I was trying to do was make a point and do something that lots of people would love to have done if only they dared."

The Dogg Show

Rapper Snoop Doggy Dogg, right, was cleared of first- and second-degree murder charges by a Los Angeles jury in February for the 1993 slaying of a rival gang member, 20-year-old Philip Woldemariam.

McKinley Lee, the rapper's bodyguard, who fired the shot from the jeep Snoop was driving, was also acquitted, but the jury remained deadlocked on lesser charges of voluntary manslaughter after almost a week of deliberations. The judge declared a mistrial, leaving it up to the prosecution to decide whether to refile the charge. Although Snoop's two-and-a-half-year legal ordeal is over, a wrongful-death civil suit against the rapper, filed by Woldemariam's family, is still pending.



Beach Boys

Pearl Jam, Porno for Pyros, the Beastie Boys, Everclear, and other wave-minded rockers have lent their talents to a benefit album for the Surfer Foundation, a nonprofit, grassroots environmental organization dedicated to the protection and enhancement of the world's oceans and beaches. "Every time there's a big storm in Los Angeles, raw sewage is dumped directly into the ocean," says Pennywise lead singer Jim Lindberg, whose band covered the Beach Boys' "Surfer U.S.A." for the album. "Unfortunately, it's on those days that the surf is best."



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LIVE!



ALANIS MORISSETTE

Roseland Ballroom, New York City
February 7, 1996

Alanis Morissette is Venus as a boy. Knock-kneed in baggy leather pants and a dove-gray satin shirt she shoplifted from Brian Jones's estate sale, she marked her territory on the Roseland stage by stomping in manic circles like a hyperactive kid at someone else's birthday party. She projects sexiness only by accident, the way cool, elusive rock dudes always have—instead of showcasing her body or her wiles during her lengthy performance, she took it for granted that all those screaming fans would be interested in her every introverted move. Which doesn't mean she wasn't entertaining, or dramatic; on the contrary, Morissette emoted with the energy of a decathlete. But her appeal, it turns out, is not her anger, which she loses interest in halfway through every song, or her honesty, which her lack of focus renders irrelevant. It's her self-absorption we all love, because girls aren't supposed to be that way. Girls are nice (common wisdom goes) or they're bitch, but either way they care what you think. Morissette acts like she doesn't even realize you're there.

Which is, of course, exactly how the cutest boy in school always acts. Morissette instinctively understands that it's a male privilege, not a female fault, to be clueless, and her graceless enthusiasm on stage translates as

liberation. Vocally, she's very poised; she let rip on those big choruses in songs like "Mary Jane" and "Head Over Feet" without losing control, and toned down enough to imitate subtlety in the quieter sections of "Perfect" and "Forgiven." "No Pressure Over Cappuccino," a new song, allowed her to try some Sarah McLachlan-like angelic crooning; her latest single, "Ironic," showed her wry, conversational side. Yet even as she and her band expertly recreated the sounds on her hit album, Morissette behaved as if she were in the throes of artistic ecstasy, skipping and jumping around the stage, giving in to autistic-child fits, and generally rocking way harder than the music ever did. When the audience took over the vocals for almost all of "You Oughta Know," Morissette gazed out at those rapt faces as if they'd just shaken her awake.

As Morissette blurted out her lyrics about oral sex and intellectual intercourse, it became obvious that she's not the Madonna-designed fake her detractors assume she must be. This former dance queen genuinely loves to play big rock music with her inflatable band (note to the bass player: That floor fan wind-sweeping your tinted locks really heightens the Fabio Effect). And like most 21-year-olds, she believes every deep thought she's ever worked into a cliché. She's not unreal, she's incomplete—a half-formed consciousness expressing itself, not yet trapped inside the habits of male or female. This year, Alanis Morissette is everybody's inner child, and her live show proves just how gifted she is at throwing the definitive tantrum. **ANN POWERS**

PAVEMENT

Liberty Lunch, Austin, Texas
February 10, 1996

There aren't many Australian tours with Texas on the itinerary, but leave it to Pavement's Stephen Malkmus to figure that America's Western states are, like, on the way home to New York. Besides, the band hadn't played many U.S. dates since its stint as one of last summer's Monsters of Indie Rock. Lollapalooza was where Pavement found greatness, throwing off a past of thrilling but often frustratingly erratic live shows to become a—well, it sounds crazy, but the phrase "well-oiled machine" comes to mind, if it can be applied to such a scattered architecture of beatific melodies, sensual head-trips, and fractal grooves.

It's also crazy to treat Pavement as stars, but that's what the sellout crowd of 1,000 or so chose to do on this muggy February night, working up a healthy swell of cheers before the band was even on stage. Frontman Malkmus stepped up to the mike and (ironically?) expelled the energy right back, screaming: "Yeah! Yeah! Aghhhh!" Then everyone eased into a loud, crystalline "Range Life," and as Malkmus snaked through the first of many controlled, glidy solos, one had to wonder

why the wry and bittersweet-voiced boy genius doesn't have guitar hero status too. Not enough windmills?

He did try a few of those, actually, but hey, the guy often sings and plays lead at the same time—"In the Mouth a Desert," his voice and fingers were a two-part harmony. Which made Pavement a rhythm quartet behind their leader's neurotic/melodic splatterings, one that deftly split the difference between noisemaking and jamming.

The staggered crescendos of "Extradition" were perfectly executed, complete with in-synch jumps and flourishes, while the sylvan "Father to a Sister of a Thought" was both fragile and swinging. A half-dozen odd and instantly memorable new songs were also unveiled, the best of which was a snewy bit of new wave from guitarist Spiral Stairs, "Painted Soldiers" (from the soundtrack to the Kids in the Hall movie).

With the artcore chaos of "Best Friend's Arm" structured just as deliberately as the queasy majesty of "Grounded," it became clear that Pavement is fractured like a fox. Maybe it's because the geographically divided band is only a genuine unit when it's on tour, but Pavement have found a way to remain organic and open-ended, able to breathe and mutate where so many of their peers (or forebears) wind up sold out, tapped out, or just plain out of it.

JASON COHEN

Pavement's
Stephen Malkmus
and Mark Ibold

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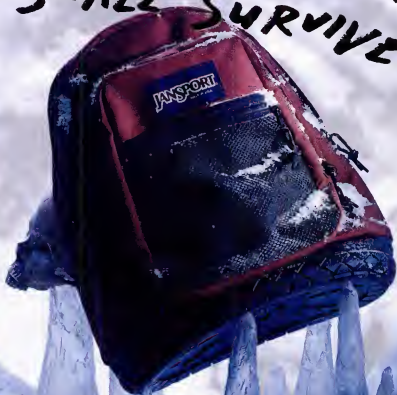
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STYLING: JENNIFER B. STANLEY; HAIR: JAMES; MAKEUP: TONYA; DRESS: JAMES; SHOES: JAMES; RIFLEMAN: JAMES; HUNTING: JAMES; GUNS: JAMES; DEER: JAMES; HUNTING SAFETY: JAMES; HUNTING ETHICS: JAMES; HUNTING LEGISLATION: JAMES; HUNTING EQUIPMENT: JAMES; HUNTING TRIPS: JAMES; HUNTING RESOURCES: JAMES; HUNTING HISTORY: JAMES; HUNTING ARTS: JAMES; HUNTING LITERATURE: JAMES; HUNTING MUSIC: JAMES; HUNTING FILMS: JAMES; HUNTING BOOKS: JAMES; HUNTING TOOLS: JAMES; HUNTING ACCESSORIES: JAMES; HUNTING SUPPLIES: JAMES; HUNTING SERVICES: JAMES; HUNTING COMMUNITIES: JAMES; HUNTING ORGANIZATIONS: JAMES; HUNTING ASSOCIATIONS: JAMES; HUNTING CLUBS: JAMES; HUNTING SOCIETIES: JAMES; HUNTING LEAGUES: JAMES; HUNTING FEDERATIONS: JAMES; HUNTING UNIONS: JAMES; HUNTING COOPERATIVES: JAMES; HUNTING PARTNERSHIPS: JAMES; HUNTING JOINT VENTURES: JAMES; HUNTING ALLIANCES: JAMES; HUNTING PARTNERSHIPS: JAMES; HUNTING JOINT VENTURES: JAMES; HUNTING ALLIANCES: JAMES

tread on me

In her eight seasons of sitcom stardom, **Roseanne**—Conner Barr Arnold, or just plain Roseanne—has broken the mold, the rules, and the backs of an industry that fears and loathes loud, strong women. As Celia Farber learns, she's only just begun. Photographs by John Scarsbrick.

It took a long time before I got Roseanne. What I picked up through osmosis, at the height of her fame, was all the media offered: her excesses. Her decadence. Her temper. Extraordinary tales of cheeseburgers and violence, with some guy named Tom Arnold and her acting out magnificent Dionysian fantasies in diners across the country, and firing their staff in frenzied sweeps. Roseanne was a white-trash icon—a female Elvis almost—whose ultimate self-destruction seemed inevitable.

What I didn't know was that her rage made sense, that it was righteous. I didn't know the first thing about her mind, her talent, or her vision. I certainly didn't know that she would emerge as a cultural touchstone, a giant among women, for women, and that I would wind up at her gate in Brentwood, with my palms upturned.

I pressed the buzzer, and a moment later a dark, dashing man with a gun on his hip ushered me



through the courtyard, past the fountain and a black scratch limo, to the Swiss chalet-style house in which she lives. Inside, it is lush, but not ostentatious. The living room looks like a reel living room, with signs of earthy kitsch, like the big taddy bear seated at the baby grand piano and a goofy painting featuring a Beatrix Potter-style frog.

A familiar angular voice echoes from the top of the stairs, getting closer and closer, and then Roseanne appears before me, with her fifth and youngest child, Buck, expertly perched in one arm. She's wearing black leggings, a black T-shirt, and no makeup except for blood-red polish. She is barefoot, and I spot a rose tattoo on her ankle. "Hi," she says fleetly, extending a hand. A maid has set down a tray of coffee and she samples it. "That is disgusting," she says to her publicist, who has joined us. The tray is removed, and swiftly replaced.

I have brought two things for her: A copy of John Lennon's *Plastic Ono Band* that a friend wanted me to give her, just in case it had been a while since she'd heard "Working Class Hero," and a Dr. Seuss book. "Dr. Seuss is my idol, man," she says. We discuss Dr. Seuss for a minute, how he supposedly sold more books than any other author, ever. "Yeah, and it was really subversive shit," she says. "He's awesome." Her Utah roots are still audible in her open ears. There is something so familiar about her—her gingerbread-brown eyes, her handsome face, her tough, percussive speech patterns—she is America incarnate. Big and mighty, insane and triumphant.

Artists are often respected before they're famous. Roseanne, as fate would have it, was famous, in fact anormously famous, before she was finely, truly respected—not just as a comedian and sitcom star, but as a cultural revolution, a working-class hero. I count myself among the recently converted, the never-have-time-to-watch-TV types who needed to have Roseanne dissolved and projected back before I could see who she was. I now wish I had seen every episode of her show *Roseanne* since its inception in 1988. It marks a watershed in television history, and TV is where America gauges itself.

By certain measures, 1995 was the year of Roseanne's cultural rebirth, and if any one event can take credit, it was John Lehr's extraordinary 18,000-word portrait of her in *The New Yorker*, which presented, for once, the wheat and not the chaff. "It was the first place," she told me, "that was ever about my work. I cried all the way through it." And in a glorious clash of brows high and low, Roseanne was called upon by Editor-in-Chief Tina Brown to consult on a special "women's issue" of *The New Yorker*, a move that led a few of the magazine's writers to resign in disgust.

Roseanne has no doubt at all about why it has taken so long for her to receive artistic recognition. Very calmly, she says, "I think that I'm not seen as an artist because I'm a woman. And I'm not seen as a visionary because I'm a woman. And I'm not seen as a producer because I'm a woman." I ask her what kind of a woman, if any, does get seen as an artist. Her answer is immediate.

"Dead ones."

All women have to walk through walls of fear and guilt before they can even speak, much less live their dreams. Roseanne's story—now the stuff of American myth—is, no matter how many times it's told, extraordinary. To have been born poor is one thing—she was also a woman, a Jew in Utah, uneducated, and trapped in a house with three kids and a beer-guzzling, contented husband by the age of 28. Breaking out of that is not mere "liberation," it's Houdini. We're expected to be impressed with stars who are so "real" they do their own laundry. I wanted to meet Roseanne because she did other people's laundry.

Born in Salt Lake City, Utah, in 1952, to Jewish, blue-collar parents, Roseanne's life is rife with what Greek philosophy claimed was the essence of comedy: incongruity. Her beloved grandmother was an Orthodox Jew, "very superstitious," her grandfather an atheist who sold crucifixes and 3-D pictures of Jesus door-to-door, while her mother trained her children to pretend they were Mormons. Her grandmother Bobbie Mary had lost all her relatives in Nazi concentration camps, and ran an apartment house for Holocaust survivors. If any women taught the young, sharp-tongued Roseanne aboutchutzpah, it was Bobbie Mary.

Roseanne remains estranged from her parents, after a much publicized battle in which she accused them of sexual transgression against their daughters. The parents have denied the charges, and her siblings, including her once-beloved sister Geraldine, have sided with them. Today, Roseanne

still views that public accusation, which didn't sit well with most of the country, as "the bravest thing I ever did." And despite it all, she does not believe that it was her father who gave her what Jewish fathers often impart to their daughters: a belief in her mind, and in humor. "When I was a little girl growing up in Salt Lake City," Roseanne once wrote, "we could say anything we wanted to in our home, as long as it was funny."

Roseanne's two best-selling autobiographies, *My Life as a Woman* (1989) and *My Lives* (1994), offer glimpses into the anarchic, very dark, and hilarious life and mind of Roseanne. She has said that she has 21 separate personalities, and her books reflect that, jumping erratically between events, decades, dreams, poems, and stream of consciousness. "I survived my childhood," she writes, "by birthing many separate identities to stand in for one another in times of great stress and fear."

At age 16, Roseanne was hit by a car, her head "impaled" by the hood ornament. "I wasn't very nuts until after I got hit by that car," she writes. After she refused to sleep for fear she would never wake up, and eventually went into convulsions, her parents placed her in the Utah state mental institution, where she spent almost a year.

When Roseanne was 18 and broke, she had a baby daughter, whom she gave up for adoption. (More than 20 years later, the two were reunited and the daughter, Brandi, came to work on *Roseanne*.) The same year, she left home, horrified by her parents' indifference to her ordeal, and spent a few months "on the road," hitchhiking. In Georgetown, Colorado, she happened upon the man who would give her her most important material, a motel night-club and hippie named Bill Penttilä. They married, and by the time she was 26, they were struggling with three kids in a 800-square-foot house. Roseanne worked as a waitress, a window dresser, a maid, and a prostitute, and then began to write comedy, often in the closet, at night, with a flashlight. Trapped at home, bored, frustrated, Roseanne started listening to the feisty talk-show host Alan Berg, who was later shot dead by the Aryan Brotherhood. After three months she worked up the courage to call in, and she read from a prepared script. "While I read it I actually paid my pants, because I was so scared, and so rusty, and so afraid. I always cried as being the first day on my way back to myself."

With Geraldine at her side, encouraging her, Roseanne started to come out, to stand up. The persona was a chubby housewife, herpooning her inert husband with one-liners, and in so doing, reversing everything that society had mapped out about marriage, motherhood, and womanhood. After knocking around Denver comedy clubs, in 1985 Roseanne showcased at the epicenter of American comedy, Mitzi Shore's Comedy Store in Los Angeles. Following her ten-minute audition, Shore recalls, "I took her right into the main room and put her on the stage there. I never did that before. Never did it since. She was instant. She was so exciting, so refreshing. I was thrilled because I knew she was going to open the doors for women in comedy."

Roseanne has no doubt why it's taken so long for her to receive artistic recognition. "I think I'm not seen as an artist because as a visionary because I'm a woman. And because I'm a woman."

That year, Roseanne was spotted by a *Tonight Show* scout and invited on. She was a thunderous success, and before long, she was cast in the role of herself, in an emerging sitcom about a working-class family. The ABC show *Roseanne* debuted in 1988, and rocketed to top ratings, where it has remained since. Though it has slipped somewhat lately, she still pulls in the fourth-highest ad rates on ABC—a quarter-of-a-million dollars per 30 seconds—right behind the Super Bowl, the Academy Awards, and *Home Improvement*. Roseanne's production company, Full Moon & High Tide, negotiated a deal with to produce up to four series, and by the end of the century, it is estimated, Roseanne will be worth about a billion dollars.

So, I wonder, does mega-success and mass adoration take away the pain that drove her into the closet with the flashlight in the first place?



I'm a woman. And I'm not seen I'm not seen as a producer

"No," she says, "as soon as it goes away, I don't think you're an artist anymore. It's got to be there to drive you. As soon as you buy that shit, you are so over."

Comedians play a sort of kamikaze role in our culture. They are live transmitters of what's true, what's horrifying, what's unsayable. What's funny. And they get heard. Particularly in these puritanical, politically correct times, nothing is more welcome than a voice that pierces dull notions of what should be with barbs of what is. Roseanne has made history by tackling everything from marital ennui, to "mistress ambivalence," to poverty, menstruation, homophobia, and mental illness in a medium that once reflected only the most sanitized versions of American family life. Roseanne Conner is heroic because she is hilarious, hilarious because she is twisted, and twisted because she is smart. Her humor comes from

the deep disdain of the outlaw; the gum-chewing mother of three who has just about had it. It also stems from her megalomania, without which Roseanne would be what so many millions of women are: silent. Roseanne has the ego of a man, but what makes it work, what makes us love it, is that she's a woman.

The mid-period Roseanne, the tabloid Roseanne, the most megalomaniacal Roseanne, was, if not created, at least greatly exacerbated by her former husband Tom Arnold, whom she now refers to as either "that person" or "that pig." Roseanne describes their marriage as her final spasm of self-abuse. "I attracted that darkness to me because that was all I knew from my childhood. I chose him to kill me. And because he gave me drugs when I was on the road and wanted to party, I thought he made me feel good, and so I hung around him more and more." Apparently, Arnold became so abusive that Roseanne finally fled to Europe to hide. "I thought he would kill me, I mean literally," she said. "I was in Spain when I heard about Nicole Brown, and I thought, Jesus man, that could easily, easily, have been me."

By all accounts, it was during Arnold's tenure as her husband and one of the show's writers that the drama around her was most charged, and many of the heads that rolled on the infamous early-'90s Roseanne set did so because of the explosive chemistry between Roseanne and Arnold.

Roseanne, for her part, went to bat for Arnold in a ferocious manner, alienating almost an entire staff. Arnold seemed to entice her toward spectacle, for the hell of it, and she, ever the performer, jumped higher and higher. It was Arnold, for instance, who encouraged Roseanne to grab her crotch during 1990's infamous "Star-Spangled Banner" debacle.

Roseanne's retelling of that incident in *My Lives* is heartbreakingly funny, and it speaks volumes about her dynamic as a performer. She writes that she never meant to botch the anthem—she meant to sing it straightforwardly, and with reverence for this country, which she loves. But the organizers at Jack Murphy Stadium in San Diego didn't give her any music, no note, to start the song on. She faced the stadium crowd, and an usher said: "Whenever you're ready, Mrs. Arnold," and as she asked "Wait a minute. Isn't there gonna be any music accompanying me?" the man shrugged and "walked backwards, really fast."

"I sang the first five words, and when I hit that note on 'see,' my voice cracked and wavered like a yodeler singing through a tubal ligation. The more I tried to steady the note, the more the bottom dropped out of it. And then I couldn't even hear myself because one of those military bases picked that time to scramble their bombers, all I could think was, 'My God, I started too high, I started too high.' Then I realized it wasn't bombers flying overhead, it was booing. They were booing me!"

"By the time I reached the 'land of the free' line I was no longer singing; instead I was screaming at the level of the Khrushchev 'We Will Bury You' speech." By the end of the song, "the whole place was booing me, even the orphaned kids there on a field day, even the nuns. That was the last straw. Fuck them all."

"On the last note I decided to punish them with my voice and make the loudest noise I've ever made in my life. She describes the holler as so loud "the whole section of navy personnel flinched...so loud that I stretched a muscle in my neck."

"I love television," Roseanne exclaims, "but the majority of people who work in television hate television. I know what television means; I always have. It's our companion, it's our teacher, it's our everything."

What she did then is what cuttiefish do when they squirt ink at a predator—what Roseanne does when threatened with humiliation or dismissal, what she always did, growing up, in order to save her skin. "I grabbed my crotch and spit, trying to at least make it funny."

By the end of the next day, the couple had gotten nearly 2,000 calls from the press. "Two thousand motherfuckers asking, 'Why'd she spit on our flag?'"

The story illustrates Roseanne's special charm: Not that she is cynical, but rather, she reacts so totally to the world it makes her occasionally hysterical. And then there's the larger point: She actually had the balls, the unfathomable balls, to get up there. How perfectly symbolic that the universe provided not so much as a note to guide her through it.

"Roseanne is Roseanne," says Mitzi Shore. "I don't think any of the elements in her life, such as her children, her husband, her parents, really are what shaped her. She was born a comedian. It's in the genes." Nonetheless, Roseanne has certainly drawn on her life experiences, converting domestic details into jokes. Her first husband, Bill Pentland, provided the material on which she built her Ur-persona: the "domestic goddess." She and Pentland remain on-and-off friends, and he was a guest at her 1995 wedding to her current husband, Ben Thomas, her former bodyguard. Thomas is the father of the eight-month-old Buck. Roseanne lights up when she talks about Thomas. "He is the most awesome human being I have ever met," she says excitedly.

True to her tradition of bringing members of her tribe with her where she goes, Roseanne is having her alterna-rock kids, Jessica, Jake, and Jennifer, ranging in age from 19 to 24, help book the music for her upcoming variety show on Fox, *Saturday Night Special*, which she hopes will air opposite

Saturday Night Live, starting in April. The show, which Roseanne is writing and producing, but not hosting, will combine animation, film, live performance, and novelty acts. "It's like something that would be on MTV," she says.

The show will be a cornerstone in Roseanne's new media empire, which will, despite earlier denials, feature another season of the long-running show that made her famous: ABC's *Roseanne*. She also won the rights to coproduce an American version of the British comedy hit *Absolutely Fabulous*, as well as the quiz show *Planet Hollywood Squares*. Finally, there are plans for an Oprah-style talk show, hosted by Roseanne.

"I love television," Roseanne exclaims, "but the majority of people who work in television hate television, which translates into hatred for the audience. People don't respect television because they don't respect the people who watch television. And that's a big mistake, that's part of the whole arrogant '60s generation. I know what television means; I always have. It's our companion, it's our teacher, it's our everything."

"What I did with Roseanne was make entertaining women not be about rape or oppression, but to be about women's lives. Now every show's doing it. They have these young women with the fashions and the hairdos, but really the whole thing is about who they're fucking, and there's no substance to them at all. That's how they mutated what I did. They are *that* fucking limited, and that stupid, and that evil. They make me sick."

Roseanne's rage has a cleansing effect. Her verbal trades are like a really good drum solo: It may sound like chaos, but there is a perfect form beneath it. This is Roseanne's instrument, and the whole point of it is that it is sharp and deadly, not blunted by nuance. It has to be sharp enough to do its job—to lance the boils of society. The "they" at which she targets the bulk of her rage are simply the keepers of the status quo, which includes "head-shrinkers, critics, journalists, lawyers, doctors, and Hollywood people."

"Television producers really don't want their mounds to get up in arms and ask for more money," she says disdainfully. "And my show is about working-class people asking for more money."

Roseanne did not invent TV sitcom realism, but she did intensify it, making family dysfunction and female rage a laughing matter, and as a nation that feeds on TV, that's no small feat. My generation, born in the '60s, was bred on TV sitcoms that lacked a single line you could imagine anybody in your family saying. How much healthier it would have been to see the Connors treating family like the barely survivable carnage that it is with lines like:

Dan: Are we missing an offspring?

Roseanne: Yeah. Where do you think I got the bacon?

"My work comes out of my life," Roseanne says, "which makes me different from everybody else here."

Roseanne's unflattering goal has been to restore respect to the beleaguered, unfashionable ruler of the world—the mother. At a time when the notion of "family" is being splintered and debased—by right-wingers who insist it must be nuclear and linear, and by a first generation of nouveau-free women who fear child-bearing as a sacrifice of their newfound freedom—Roseanne, at the core of her radicalism, has a downright traditional message.

"I do believe that the most important thing that any woman can do is to raise children, for her own karma and for the world. Until a woman has children, she'll never be a woman, she'll only be a girl. That's where her power comes from. That's the one thing men have been right about."

The more she talks, the more I realize how subversive Roseanne truly is. I got into debates with friends about her, and the strata of Roseanne's persona that some people just can't get past is the same sociological straitjacket that women have struggled with for centuries. However they strain to articulate their displeasure, all it really comes down to is that she is "uncouth."



Roseanne "sings" the National Anthem, 1990.

IT WAS UNDERSTOOD, NO ONE BOUGHT HER DRINKS,
AND EVERY GUY IN THE PLACE WAS IN LOVE WITH HER.

SMOKED KAMELS.



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A longstanding shortcoming of left-wing commentators in this country has been their phobia of the actual working class. Roseanne, both the show and the woman, have similarly ruffled feminist feathers—although you'd think feminism would want to put a fully alive woman who has faced, endured, and transcended the daily struggles of wives and mothers on a postage stamp. "Roseanne is the neglected underside of the American female experience," wrote feminist historian Barbara Ehrenreich in a recent essay, "bringing together the great themes of poverty, obesity, and defiance." Roseanne's past includes years as a feminist radical, working at feminist bookstores, and getting into rumble with the snootier members of the movement. She still bristles when I mention establishment feminism and their response to her.

"They're terrified of me," she says. "Because I'm for women's power, not women's subjugation, and they are a false construct invented by men to keep women down."

"What do the feminists say to you?" I wonder. "That you're antiwoman?"

"They wouldn't dare say that. They say I'm mentally ill. A bitch. Power-mad. A control freak. Crazy. Mostly they just say I'm fat. They wouldn't say antiwoman because my body of work proves that I'm not. I can count on two hands the women who have written positive things about my work."

Regarding another highly scrutinized woman, I ask her about the recent, much-talked-about Princess Diana TV interview, and the answer explodes from her mouth.

"I think she's fucking great. She collapsed that whole fucking monarchy. She is a *girl for girls*. She showed the Royal Family for exactly what they are: no class."

Fame, on most people, has a tranquilizing effect. Not Roseanne. Her bullshit detector remains undulled after almost ten years of stardom. She'll say anything. About



The family, from left, Brandi, Jake, Jennifer, Roseanne, Jessica, and Ben.

"They're terrified of me," says Roseanne of establishment feminists. "They say I'm mentally ill. Power-mad. A control freak. Crazy. Mostly they just say I'm fat."

anyone. When, for instance, in the *New Yorker* profile, she slammed three of Hollywood's leading "strong women"—Meryl Streep, Susan Sarandon, and Jodie Foster—the shock was palpable. She called them "castrated females," too middle-class and white, and said they were all "fuckin' deluded." They don't have any subtext to anything they say." It was a rare punk-rock moment, and you could practically hear the tongue-clucking all the way from Beverly Hills. "It wasn't a personal attack," says Roseanne. "I know that those women are incredibly talented. They're just not allowed to do what they fucking want to. I feel mad for them, not at them."

What's fascinating about Roseanne's brand of feminism is that it simultaneously assumes the worst about female victimization, and expects the most in retaliation. Roseanne exemplifies the way in which working-class and middle-class feminist notions are worlds apart. Here's Roseanne, for instance, on contemporary feminism's greatest triumph.

"I hate that 'sexual harassment' horseshit. It's like the witch hunts. It's more antiwoman than anything. If you can't turn your stupid ass around and go, 'If you fucking say that to me one more time I'm gonna kick your fucking balls in,' Bob Packwood should still be in Congress, and those stupid women, they should have just kicked his balls in and that would have stopped it. It's all about being the cause of an erection. That's our value. And if you don't give them an erection, then you are a fucking heretic. And if you're fat like me and you don't give a shit if they get an erection or not, then they really hate you. I don't give a fuck."

"How weak are women now? If a guy says, 'You can't have this promotion or this job unless you suck my dick or something,' then..."

Suddenly, she falls silent. She stares out the window and says quietly to herself, "I can't say this. Can I say this?" She looks right at me and says in a soft voice, "suck his dick." It took all I had not to fall off the sofa. She continues. "...Just suck his dick, like all the other women before you did.

And then get to be his boss. And then fire him. How fucking hard is that to figure out? Suck as many dicks as you can, men. Then get up there, and fire them all. I did."

I am staring at her wide-eyed. "I didn't literally suck anybody's dick 'cause you don't literally have to. There's other ways to do it. Figuratively. Suck all the dicks you can, figuratively. And they will reward you for that. And if you have to suck it, like, three times to get promoted, the third time you bite the fucker off."

At 9 A.M. the following day, I arrive at Studio City, to the House of Horrors, the set of *Roseanne*. The studio is a vast warehouse, with bleachers in the back, and the doll-house-like re-creations of living quarters. There it is, the Connors' musty, cluttered living room, loaded with trinkets and clashing furniture. I take my seat in a row of chairs a few feet behind the table where the cast, crew, and writers are gathering. Roseanne is sitting at the table, in sweats and a baseball cap, listening intently to a

group of three women, one of whom is describing her recent evisceration of a lover who failed to perform. The women details precisely what he failed to perform. Roseanne and the three women, who are writers—and are dressed in flannel shirts, boots, and no makeup—hoot and banter. The women are talking like sailors, and the men are sitting quietly, studying their scripts. Cool.

The reading starts. The episode is about a temp job that Roseanne and her TV sister Jackie, played by Laurie Metcalf, take, and botch, eventually causing mayhem in the store. The job is offering supermarket samples of two products: "Soya-Sausage" and "Cheese in a Can." John Goodman, the wonderful bear who plays Roseanne's husband, Dan, is slumped at the end of the table, booming forth his lines. Roseanne reads affectlessly, for now. Several parts are read by stand-ins. At the end, a brief round of applause, and the crowd disperses. "I can talk to you now," Roseanne says, and I follow her to her trailer, where she collapses into a sofa. Inside it is small but cozy, and there are several baby props. In an adjacent room, a nanny changes Buck's diaper.

Roseanne exudes a protective aura about her. Her heft has served as both empowerment and its opposite. Without it, she would not be Roseanne, and I hope she keeps it forever. Weight is a matter of class in America, the ultimate measure of feminine failure, at least by bourgeois standards. This schism was apparent in one of Roseanne's *Barbara Walters* interviews, in which Roseanne announced that she sometimes likes being fat. Walters' well-coiffed head shot forward in amazement. "You like being fat?" Walters asked incredulously. "Yeah," Roseanne laughed, and Walters cocked her head in sympathy.

Thomas walks in, and leans over to kiss Roseanne. The *Tonight Show* has asked Roseanne to come on, but she wants to limit her appearance to 20 minutes. They want more. Roseanne sighs. "It is incredible what happens when you give people the finger." The nanny hands over Buck, and Roseanne lifts him into the air, and for the first time I see her smile, really smile. She sings to him and he makes a funny noise. "Usually when I sing to him he starts crying," she says. Thomas tells her that they have to go look at some property. "I want to go to Toys 'R' Us," Roseanne protests. "No time," Thomas says. "Honey." Okay. One hour at Toys 'R' Us. Out on the trailer porch, people are lined up to talk to her, including one of her daughters and the show's main writer, Eric Gilliland. Roseanne's daughter Jennifer crosses her arms and says,



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"I am going to talk to her and that is that." Gilliland hunches by the wall. The next day, the script is being practiced, but not shot. Roseanne is in a mood. "Come on, let's get this over with, I've got to get out of here," she barks. She and Laurie Matcaiff take their places in the mock super-market. Reading their not-yet-memorized lines from the scripts, the dramatization sometimes stalls, but is spurred on by bursts of laughter from the staff. Jackie insists that Roseanne admit she has her best at selling Cheese in a Can. Roseanne refuses, and says that Jackie's product sells itself, and so they switch. Eventually, a food fight erupts, and Jackie sprays dishwashing liquid all over Roseanne. The scene closes with the store manager coming in. "Get out!" he yells at the sisters. "You mean we don't work here anymore?" Roseanne whines, annoyed and bored. "Are you kidding?" he asks, "I don't even think I work here anymore." But the last line is Roseanne's, and it gets a big roar. "Okay. Who do we see about getting paid?"

The actors disperse, and somebody pulls Roseanne aside. Trouble. At last I witness the legendary temper. Off in the distance, I see her snatch a telephone and holler into it. "Tell him he's not allowed on the set of my goddamn show ever again." I don't ask. From my admittedly safe distance, I view her infamous tantrums as something between activism and performance art. Women just don't do that. Therefore, I get a vicarious thrill out of the fact that she does. As I retreat into the writers' quarters, there is some sense of woundedness in the air, never quite articulated beyond vague comments about "what it's like to work here." Traumatic no doubt, but also lucrative, and almost certainly challenging. Again, gender changes everything.

"I've been here for many years," says Story Editor Allan Stephan, "and I'm crazy about her. There is a reason why people get fired. But because she's a woman, she gets called a bitch, a lunatic, a tyrant. God forbid she should be right."

"Roseanne Conner is like entry-level Roseanne. She's Roseanne 101. A sitcom about who I really am would be a little too scary. That would have to be on cable. Public access, maybe."

"She rescued me from the pound," says one female writer, a former struggling stand-up comedian. She opens the door to her office, where five writers, three of them women, have gathered. "We call this the gyno-room. But we let these two guys in. They're pretty smart."

Later, via telephone, fellow Comedy Store graduate Garry Shandling (*The Larry Sanders Show*) vouches for Roseanne's professionalism. "She's done my show twice. The last time, we kept her for a whole day, much longer than I had originally told her, and she was perfectly nice, much nicer than I would have been."

"Roseanne splits the culture," says *New York* drama critic and Staff Writer John Lehr. "People love her and people hate her. They hate her for being funny and powerful and fat and saying the things she does. It offends them."

"Everybody in this house is a good writer," Lehr continues. "Some are great writers. But not one of us can write a joke. If we could write the line, 'If my kids are alive at five o'clock when my husband comes home, then I've done my job,' we would be making a million dollars a week."

Around nine o'clock one evening, I'm back in New York, and my phone rings. "Hi!!! The voice needs no introduction. 'Since was spaka," she tells me, "I've totally changed my way of thinking."

"Uh-oh."

"Yeah, I know."

My son is throwing a fit on the floor because I wouldn't let him eat an entire bottle of Flintstones vitamins for dinner. I realize, ironically, that this is the first time in my professional life that I have felt utterly unapologetic that my child is making noise. But I'm not at all worried about what she

will think, and she is one of the biggest stars in the world.

I put my son to bed and call her back. I can tell immediately that this is one of the Roseannes I haven't met before. She speaks slowly and carefully, and repeats several times, nervously almost, that she has decided to do another season after all, and she wants me to know why.

"I started to decide that I wanted to do another season about four weeks ago. I had a spiritual awakening this year. I was just going more and more into the things I really believe and, um, getting kind of scared. I was censoring myself a lot, which happens when you work in mainstream mediums. I decided I wasn't going to do that anymore."

"I wanted to put the show back where it should be. When you're in your own darkness, you don't see that you're emanating darkness. I forgot that as Roseanne Barr Thomas Arnold fucking whatever I am, that I was Roseanne and that the story I wanted to bring to television was about my life."

In a previous interview, when I asked about the differences between the two Roseannes, she said, "Roseanne Conner is like entry-level Roseanne. She's Roseanne 101. A sitcom about who I really am would be a little too scary. That would have to be definitely be on cable. Public access, maybe."

She pauses again on the phone. "The story that I wanted to tell was a story of how dreams come true. You know, the American dream, and how these incredible things happened to me, who used to be this housewife with all these kids."

"You mean something like that is going to happen to Roseanne Conner?" I ask.

"Yeah. It always was the plan. I was going to end this season with Roseanne Conner stepping on stage to do stand-up. But I had not been true to that because I was so damaged from this horrible person I chose to bring into my life and all the other wrong choices I've made to punish myself. And I regret that I never gave Roseanne Conner her own dream that comes true. I was always showing the hardness of my life because it was always really hard



Roseanne and company are coming back for one final season.

until recently. I was always showing these poor people who were working really hard, but were never getting ahead. I realized that I came here literally out of a trailer because I didn't believe that. And I have to correct that because I can't leave these characters in a place where their hard work never pays off."

In the last three shows, Roseanne tells me, the characters will each make a choice that will lead them out. She plans to get them all out.

"I was always afraid to do that, because the press would distort what I meant when I talked about working-class values. But at the base of all working-class values is the hope and dream for a better life. I wanted to say to people that nobody can stop you if you think you're unstoppable. No system, no man, no government. No nothing." ■



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the big show

Once upon a time, sportscasters were about as smart and witty as well, the athletes they covered. Then ESPN's **Keith Olbermann** and **Dan Patrick** came along. Mike Rubin meets *SportsCenter's* tag team supreme. Photographs by Chris Buck.

It's 12:06 A.M. in the darkened lobby of ESPN Plaza in Bristol, Connecticut, the headquarters of the 24-hour cable sports channel. Dan Patrick, one of the anchors of the 11 P.M. edition of *SportsCenter*, the network's hour-long summary of the day's events in the wide world of sports, slouches dejectedly through the corridor with his head down, his blazer tossed over his shoulder. In front of the receptionist's desk, seated at a baby grand piano, is basketball star and NBA marketing messiah Grant Hill of the Detroit Pistons in full game uniform, tickling the ivories with some cocktail jazz. "What's wrong?" the Fila/Sprite/GMC Trucks pitchman asks of Patrick. "Bad show," reports Patrick grimly. "Hair looked bad, TelePrompTer went down, made some mistakes on some highlights." He sighs deeply and shakes his head. "I've got something that will cheer you up," offers Hill, breaking into a jaunty rendition of the stadium standard known to season-ticket holders everywhere simply as "Charge!" You can see Patrick's spirits begin to rise, the color rushing back into his face. "Thanks; thanks, Grant," says Patrick, gratefully dropping a wadded bill into Hill's tip goblet, touching nothing but the bottom of the cup.

Playoff-fever dream? Concession-stand nacho cheese-induced hallucination? No, just a commercial from the very clever advertising campaign for *SportsCenter*, that, along with an appearance in the Hootie & the Blowfish video "Only Wanna Be With You," has helped make Patrick and his co-anchor, Keith Olbermann, familiar faces even in households where the word "sports" is an expletive. Among fans of athletic pursuits, in fact, it wouldn't be too far-fetched to say that the popularity of the two ESPN sportscasters is beginning to rival even that of Hill, who's been the leading vote recipient in All Star balloting for both of his NBA seasons. Indeed, Olbermann and Patrick were recently named by *TV Guide* to their list of the ten top tube personalities of 1995, a roll call that also included the likes of Jerry Seinfeld, Oprah Winfrey, Jimmy Smits, Johnnie Cochran and Marcia Clark, the whole frigging cast of *Friends*, and, um, John Tesh.

More than just an arcane stat-fest or slam-dunk montage (though those elements are certainly present in abundance), *SportsCenter* is an always entertaining if sometimes unstable mixture of standout journalism and stand-up comedy, equal parts evening news and *Evening at the Improv*. Frequently mimicked but rarely matched, *SportsCenter* has become the definitive source for sports news and information, offering armchair jocks the chance to hear the evening's scores without having to suffer through such trivial diversions as world news and local weather.

With three live shows daily, *SportsCenter* relies upon its anchors to



write their own material, allowing them the chance to express their own personalities and strengths. The 6:30 P.M. *SportsCenter*, for example, usually anchored by Charley Steiner and longtime ESPN stalwart Bob Ley (one of the few on-air personalities left from the network's earliest days), has become *The Huntley-Brinkley Report* of sports journalism, focusing on a hard-news format for the dinner-time audience. Meanwhile, Olbermann and Patrick's 11 P.M. edition (dubbed "the Big Show") is the network's runaway hit, combining a frantic, opinionated rundown of the day's sporting events with a zany, anarchic tone, sort of a hybrid of the shows it airs against:

Nightline, *The Late Show*, and *Beavis and Butt-head*. The stable of other *SportsCenter* anchors may be solid, but to borrow a phrase from ESPN's hyperventilating basketball analyst Dick Vitale, Olbermann and Patrick are prime-time players, baby.

Olbermann, 37, and Patrick, 38, project a loose, comfortable jocularity that makes their vaudevillian patter seem more like conversation between sports fans than the typical broadcast-news happy talk. Olbermann indulges in an array of funny voices and winking asides—his eyebrows seem to have a vocabulary all their own—raving till he's practically out of breath.

In contrast, Patrick favors a cool, detached demeanor and sly, dry humor. Along with *The X-Files*' Mulder and Scully and *Homicide*'s Pemberton and Bayliss, Olbermann and Patrick are arguably the best partnership currently on TV.

"The advantage of these two different styles is when you've had absolutely enough of me, it's Dan's turn," says Olbermann. "And when you've had enough of Dan, it's my turn. An hour of either one of us would be hated. *Hated*."

"I don't mind being painted as the straight man," says Patrick, "because I can get away with a whole lot more that way."

"But I don't have to go out there and be the goofball," counters Olbermann. "We have a mutual level of goofballness. Dan is just as sick as I am—just as sick."

ESPN is for addicts, pure and simple, a place where sports junkies can indulge their obsession, wallowing in statistical bliss and highlight heaven even as their social batting average is sinking ever insistently below the interpersonal version of the Mendoza Line (i.e., .200, that barometer of baseball-hitting mediocrity). Some wag once quipped that the network's initials stood for "Every Spouse's Personal Nightmare," and the programming schedule certainly seems like grounds for irreconcilable differences: more than 65 different sports, including college basketball and football, pro hockey, baseball, football, and boxing, plus dozens of other events you probably couldn't pay me to watch.

ESPN's franchise player, however, is clearly *SportsCenter*. "It's really the cornerstone of our programming," says President and CEO Steven M. Bornstein. "We were able to say that sports [coverage] can, in fact, be journalism. It had been done in print before, but [ESPN Executive Editor] John Walsh and his people brought it to video." *SportsCenter* has



Center of attention: Keith Olbermann, left, and Dan Patrick.

become essential viewing in an era when an increasing amount of sports news unfolds away from the playing field: star athletes beating up their wives or girlfriends, supposed institutions of higher learning mortgaging their academic integrity in exchange for the windfall that a winning squad of "student-athletes" provides, multimillionaire owners holding the good faith and childlike loyalty of entire communities hostage in their quest for further profit. The unseemly presence of money and marketing is everywhere. By now, most major airlines have stadiums christened in honor of their corporate largesse—Chicago's United Center, Washington, D.C.'s USAir Arena, New Jersey's Continental Airlines Arena—while post-season college-football games are saddled with brand-name loyalty to their sponsors and underwriters, creating ungainly mouthfuls like the Poulan/Weed Eater Independence Bowl and the Hooters Hula Bowl (both of which, incidentally, aired on ESPN).

In contrast, the articulate and acerbic anchors of *SportsCenter* speak for that most ignored element in the sports equation: the fan. "We do a kind of consumer-based sports show," says Olbermann. "We're not afraid to say, 'Hey, this is a fraud,' or 'These uniforms are butt-ugly.'" While interviewing former Red Pete Rose once, for example, Cincinnati native Patrick told his boyhood hero—bestower of his first autograph, in 1966—that Rose's gambling scandal had embarrassed the Queen City, while Olbermann wore a black armband on the show the night he announced that the rest of the 1994 baseball season and the World Series were being canceled.

"Bud Selig and Don Fehr, they're not helping the



Each night, Olbermann offers up a relentless barrage of pop-culture references, like Dennis Miller without the smarm.

game," says Patrick of the principals in baseball's labor squabbles. "In fact, Bud Selig came up here to have a luncheon with us, and I didn't want to go. Why do I want to see Bud Selig?"

"I didn't go," says Olbermann, "and he left a note on my desk saying he was sorry I wasn't there because it was going to be his chance to defend himself. And I thought, 'Hey I've done something here. The commissioner of baseball is afraid of me!'"

Olbermann maintains that these populist positions aren't contrived stances but rather sentiments "as spontaneous as a fan shouting at a game. People, especially in sports now, are being completely saturated with means to lift dollars out of their wallets, and we don't buy that stuff. We're willing to criticize what seemingly is our meat."

Olbermann honed his fervor for the national pastime as a die-hard Yankees fan in Hastings-on-Hudson, New York. "I grew up in Yankee Stadium," insists Olbermann. "We didn't go on vacation—we had season tickets to Yankees games." Olbermann knew by age eight that he wouldn't make it as a ballplayer, and quickly figured that broadcasting might be his ticket to the big leagues. At Hackley Prep in Tarrytown, New York, he signed up for the high school radio station, where he followed a kid named Chris Berman, a senior to Olbermann's sophomore (and now ESPN's best-known broadcaster). "I was always planning on having this job someday," says Olbermann.

Growing up in Cincinnati, Patrick devotedly followed the exploits of the Big Red Machine. "When I was 12 I used to cut the pictures out of *Sports Illustrated* the day it came and paste them on my wall," says Patrick of his lifelong passion. "I knew I wanted to broadcast sports. I just didn't know exactly how. One day I was sitting in a Dayton, Ohio, frat house in 1979 and I remember when ESPN came on, and Bob Ley and George Grande were doing *SportsCenter*, and I turned to the two guys who were there with me and I said 'That's nirvana. I'm going to do that.'"

Like a close play at the plate, Olbermann and Patrick were on a collision course. After college at Cornell, Olbermann worked in radio before taking a job at an embryonic CNN in 1981. Meanwhile, Patrick—who played minor-league baseball in the Cincinnati Reds organization and college basketball at Eastern Kentucky before transferring to Dayton—did local radio and TV in Dayton until landing his big break: replacing Olbermann at CNN in 1984. After six years there, Patrick finally got his dream job at ESPN in 1989. Olbermann spent seven years in the Boston and L.A. broadcast markets before joining ESPN in 1992, and the two, save for Olbermann's six-month stint in necktie-less exile on ESPN2, have been "tag-team partners" ever since.

Olbermann and Patrick's time slot may put them directly against the reigning titans of late-night TV—Dave, Jay, and Ted—but the duo has done more than hold their own on the late shift. Each night, Olbermann offers up a relentless barrage of pop-culture references, like Dennis Miller without the smarm or *Mystery Science Theater 3000* without the bad flicks. Olbermann might quote James Thurber, reprise a Steven Thurler routine, or refer to an overtime period as "the bonus canto." A game-winning layup by University of Utah basketball player Ben Melmoth occasioned Olbermann to cite "Sebastian Melmoth," the pseudonym that Oscar Wilde used after his release from prison. For a stretch last year, the staff even used a picture of the U.S.'s 11th president, James K. Polk, as a running transition device to introduce seemingly unrelated show segments.

"Who knows what we've unleashed?" says Olbermann of the nonathletic allusions. "I get letters from people who say, 'I didn't get that joke and I went and looked up who President Polk was....' In stupid little ways, we work on people's minds."

Or on their funny bones. Olbermann and Patrick both possess impeccable comic timing and wicked wits that border on the caustic; when the duo is in a zone ("basketball term," as Patrick might quip), there's no telling what targets they might skewer. Rolling a highlight of talented but always underachieving journeyman center Benoit Benjamin, Olbermann remarked, "He's now scored a point in ten straight seasons!" "Ooh, I wish we had highlights

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of these," cooed Patrick while flashing the score of a win by the virtual expansion team the New Jersey Nets over the actual expansion Toronto Raptors. Olberrmann calls the NFL team that announced its plans to move to L.A. from the Pacific Northwest "the artists formerly known as the Seattle Seahawks," yells "Anthony!" while showing clips of the Vancouver Grizzlies' Greg Anthony (in the style of those early '70s Prince spaghetti commercials), and greets every piece of footage featuring the New Jersey Devils' Scott Niedermayer or the Florida Panthers' Rob Niedermayer by shouting "Niedermeyer: dead!" which, as any self-respecting togaphile knows, is from *National Lampoon's Animal House*.

One of Patrick's running gags is mentioning the finishing position of stock car racer Dick Trickle—yes, his real name—no matter how far back in the pack he ends up. Mr. Trickle came in dead last in February's Daytona 500, for instance, bowing out after only nine laps. "That actually started when I was at CNN because NASCAR is so big in the South," explains Patrick. "When you watch NASCAR, it's the same guys who are usually in the top five, and I remember scrolling through to see who else was on the NASCAR circuit. There's Dick Mast, Leke Speed, just some great names you would find in cartoons. Then one day I saw 'Dick Trickle.' I thought, 'Oh my God, the poor guy!'"

"It can't be!" echoes Olberrmann.

"I thought, 'Well, this guy's not any good,'" continues Patrick, "but he's a good old boy and he really represents what NASCAR used to be. He just loves to drive. I monitored his finishes for like three weeks: 'Dick Trickle finished 23rd. Dick Trickle crashed. Dick Trickle's engine fell off. Dick Trickle couldn't get the keys to his car.' " Patrick began using Trickle's name on the air, and the joke soon became a show staple. Patrick eventually had the opportunity to speak to Trickle, whom the anchor describes as being "very gracious. His daughter sent me and Keith all kinds of Dick Trickle memorabilia, our Dick Trickle Fan Club cards..."

"My number's lower than Dan's is," points out Olberrmann, whipping out his membership badge. "I'm a card-carrying Dick Trickleist."

This issue of euphemistic homonyms is perhaps something of a glass

house for a man who went through most of his life with the name "Dan Pugh"—he changed it to "Dan Patrick" at his boss's suggestion while working at CNN—but Patrick has enjoyed a long tradition of such sobriquet silliness. His childhood priest was named Father Blome—two syllables—and lately he's become enamored with the Buffalo Sabres' Mike Peca. "I can't talk about him on the record, though," he laughs.

Mike Peca notwithstanding, the duo is rarely at a loss for words, even if, by Patrick's estimation, "60 to 70 percent of the show is ad-libbed." Sports coverage is both tradition-laden and cliché-ridden, and the ESPN staff have added more than a few of their own bon mots to the broadcast lexicon. Sometime *SportsCenter* anchor and current *NFL GameDay/NFL PrimeTime* host Chris Berman carved a reputation for himself by coining goofy nicknames for players like Jim "Two Silhouettes on" Deshaies, Wally "Absorbine" Joyner, and Eric "Sleeping With" Bienamy. Olberrmann and Patrick likewise have their own prolific glossaries. Patrick's phrasebook includes "the whiff!" (a strikeout, coined by Patrick playing Wiffle ball with his brother as a kid); "en fuego" (Spanish for "on fire," as in any player who's on a hot streak; Patrick initially used the term "a fuego," or "the fire," until a Spanish teacher in Pennsylvania wrote in to correct him); "you can't stop him, you can only hope to contain him" (blurted out once after a triple by weak-hitting former Houston Astro Benny DiStefano; "It's for those guys who are kind of on the periphery of being a decent player," says Patrick); "o-ver-time" (a Ronald Reagan impression); and one of his simplest, but most enduring, the delicately enunciated and tersely emitted "...good" (a successful long-range basketball shot, in imitation of a Georgia Tech basketball announcer).

One of Patrick's running gags is mentioning the finishing position of stock car racer Dick Trickle—yes, his real name.

An incomplete sampling of Olberrmann's arsenal includes "he put the biscuit in the basket" (a hockey goal, something he heard on a Canadian newscast of a Ontario Junior Hockey League game); "from way downtown: bang!" (a three-point shot, in tribute to the late Boston Celtic announcer Johnny Most); "a Robert Goulet-up" (a layup, in honor of the *Camelot* crooner's series of commercials for ESPN's college-basketball broadcasts); "they're not going to get him!" (when a base runner is safe; Olberrmann's impression of Patrick's impression of baseball announcer Jack Buck's botched call in the 1991 World Series); and the nonsensical "drooling the drool of regret on the pillow of remorse" (which Olberrmann conceived of as an "anti-catchphrase catchphrase").

Of course, as *Saturday Night Live* has proved, coining catchphrases is fraught with creative peril, to say nothing of the unforeseen occupational hazards. "I was at the Super Bowl," recounts Patrick, "and this guy is like, 'C'mon, give it to me. Give it to me.' I'm thinking, I don't know, I've got 87 catchphrases, what do you want?"

"The good one," smiles Olberrmann.

"Exactly," laughs Patrick. "It's like 'I'm playing Password with this guy. He's like, 'You know, you know.' I'm like, 'Why don't you say it?' He says, 'No, no. I can't say it like you say it!' I said, 'What's it begin with?' It begins with N: I'm like, 'N? Nothing but the bottom of the net?' 'No, no!' he says. 'N fuego!'"

"And that was NFL commissioner Tagliabue," deadpans Olberrmann.

In person, the pair comport themselves much the way they do on the air, constantly finishing each other's sentences or anecdotes, making sardonic barbs at the other and self-deprecating swipes at themselves. Olberrmann cites radio funnyman Bob and Ray as his favorite comedians, and he approaches his partnership with Patrick with their m.o. in mind. "Their goal was to make the other one crack up uncontrollably on the air," explains



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Olbemann. "To the degree that we have any success, I think it's the same thing."

A quick glance inside their claustrophobic Bristol offices confirms that the duo are not your father's sportscasters. Basidas photos of his wife and three young children (Olbemann is single), Patrick's desk is decorated with a giant stand-up cardboard cutout of New York Jets quarterback Boomer Esiason hawking Lay's potato chips and a "Fraa Pate—Cooperstown Bound" Pete Rosa bumper sticker. A black "Dick Trickle Fan Club Member" T-shirt is draped over the back of his swivel chair. Above Olbemann's desk hang pictures of Groucho Marx, Rip Torn as Artie on *The Larry Sanders Show*, and the cast of Comedy Central's *Mystery Science Theater 3000*, which he describes as "the best TV show I ever saw in my life." Amidst a variety of baseball memorabilia is a picture of the opening-day rosters of the 1886 Boston Red Stockings and New York Giants; upon closer examination, one can see future Hall of Famer Old Hoss Radbourn discreetly flipping the bird to the photographer.

When footage rolls of a Toronto player scoring and celebrating a goal, Olbemann shouts, "That's for Alanis Morissette's pain!"

The atmosphere at the Bristol offices is one of intense, focused work, but also of fun, the kind of fun that comes from making kids' games your life's intense, focused work. "My vocation is 99 percent of America's avocation," says Charley Stainer. "It's my job, but the fans take it a lot more seriously."

In the newsroom, the staff mills about, talking shop, mumbling Hot Stove gossip, reading through the morning papers. Freshly tanned from a vacation, Barman walks through the office, cheerfully greeting secretaries. Producers and anchors are on the phone, working sources. Scores of cherubic production assistants hustle about briskly, carrying precariously balanced stacks of videotapes. "Getting paid to watch sports definitely has its benefits," says 24-year-old PA Manny Diaz of his task of viewing and editing the evening's highlights. "I always heard, as long as you like what you're doing, it's not work. If you can't play, it's the next best thing. We can't all be seven feet tall and 300 pounds."

When everything flows together on the Big Show, the resulting product appears seamless, but as a February visit to the set proved, it's more like the controlled chaos of a M.A.S.H. unit receiving incoming wounded. When the red camera lights go off and the show cuts to commercial, the studio instantly fills with PAs running back and forth clutching shot sheets, which indicate to the anchors what highlights they'll be riffing on. With the evening's games just ending or still in progress as they go on the air at 11, Olbemann and Patrick are often seeing the footage for the very first time along with the audience at home, and as one of the *SportsCenter* commercials points out, it's live TV and anything can happen. "It's certainly a show without a net,"

says Patrick. Olbemann describes his and Patrick's roles in the process as "a couple of guys in a foxhole with popguns, being shot at by the entire German army."

As camera people and the stage manager flit about in preparation, Olbemann and Patrick sit on their haunches, waiting for the conclusion of the Tulane-Louisville basketball game so tonight's show can get underway. Once on the air, their sarcastic spontaneity begins bubbling forth. When Patrick says the name of Cleveland Browns owner Art Modell—who has just flipped the bird, Old Hoss Radbourn-style, at the people of Cleveland, ignoring one of the NFL's most devoted fan bases to move his team to Baltimore—Olbemann hisses off-camera.

Returning from a commercial, the highlights include a shot of gangly 7'7" Washington Bullets center Gheorghe Muresan reaching down the front of his shorts to scratch himself. "Hay! Hay! What was that?" hollers Olbemann. "What kind of shot was that?"

"Gheorghe was looking for his Muresan," shoots back Patrick.

A few minutes later, during the 12:17 commercial break, Patrick wonders, "Is the show over yet? We've got Gheorghe Muresan doing a cup check.... This is the 'fast-good edition' of SportsCenter.... By Gheorghe, he's got it."

Back on camera again, Olbemann handles highlights of the Toronto Maple Leafs-Los Angeles Kings game. When footage rolls of a Toronto player scoring and celebrating a goal, Olbemann shouts, "That's for Alanis Morissette's pain!"

"What's following us?" asks Patrick during the next commercial break. "Ladies' pro bowling?"

"Gahhh!" responds Olbemann.

Indeed, a few minutes later, the familiar "da-da-da, da-da-da" of the *SportsCenter* theme swells, and the duo's shtick fades into the sounds of spasms and strikes. The crew relaxes, and when Olbemann and Patrick unfurl their legs from behind the studio desks, I see that they're both wearing blue jeans beneath their blazer-and-ties, just two overgrown kids who refuse to allow the suits to steal the game from the fans. "We're like guys who ran out on the field," says Olbemann, "and the players said, 'Okay, you can stay for a while.'"

It's been a long day, and although the pair aren't too keen on beginning a shoot with the SPIN photographer at 12:30 A.M., Olbemann and Patrick dutifully oblige: first posing as prompted, then playfully clowning around, cracking each other up all the while. Patrick's boyhood claric "Father Blome" gets name-checked repeatedly. Before long, the scheduled ten-minute session has turned into an hour, until a new crew filters into the studio for the broadcast of the show's two A.M. edition. As the duo themselves might attest, you can't stop *SportsCenter*, you can only hope to contain it. ●

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schlock treatment

Aaron Spelling, auteur of such TV landmarks as *The Love Boat*, *Beverly Hills, 90210*, and *Savannah*, gets the third degree from MTV's resident bitch, Kennedy.

Kennedy: What did you have when you first came to Hollywood?

Aaron Spelling: A burning desire not to go back to Texas.

Was it horrible there?

Texas is a nice place, but I was born in a house that cost \$6,000, with wall-to-wall people and one bathroom. My dad was a tailor at Seers and I had days when I was sent to buy day-old bread because I was the cute cottonheaded kid, and they gave me more for the dime.

If your first house cost \$6,000, how much did your current house cost?

I'll take the Fifth on that. Let's just say a lot more. A lot more.

I read that you have 2,992 grand-total hours of entertainment, or 15 million feet of film. Did you and your wife ever consider using that footage as ribbon in the gift-wrapping room of your palatial home?

We've actually gone over 3,000 hours. You'd be surprised, though, at our gift-wrapping room. It's something my wife, Candy, loves to do, and she is marvelous at it. She sent some Christmas presents that people still haven't opened.

Which character on *Meirose Place* best personifies Aaron Spelling?

The Aaron Spelling that first came out to Hollywood? Andrew Shue, the "Billy" character. But I can't relate to any of the show's other male characters at this point in my life, so now it's probably Heather [Locklear].

How do you create the perfect TV bitch?

She has to be attractive, she has to have a flair. But she also has her moments of sensitivity. The audience loves Heather because of those moments, although they also love to hate her. You just have to remember that the snake always gets the best lines. I bet you can't tell me one line that Adam said to Eve in the Garden of Eden. But I'll bet you remember that stupid line about the apple, don't you?

Speaking of one of your past bitches, do you think you'll ever have Shannen Doherty back on *90210*?

I don't think she would want to come back, and I don't think we would have her back. I still have great memories of Shannen staying over at the house with my daughter Tori that first year. She was Tori's best friend. They were like two little kids, running around in their pajamas, reiding the refrigerator at night, giggling, watching TV until one or two in the morning.



What was Tori like as a child?

Very, very shy. All she ever wanted to do was own a pet store. That was her dream: "Work herd, and daddy will buy me a pet store." When I see her on *The Tonight Show*, I can't believe it's our Tori.

I like her character, Donna, on *90210*.

I do, too. And you know what? If the show goes on for 12 more years, she's still going to stay a virgin. We get so much mail from parents, and kids who write personally to me and say things like, "I'm not embarrassed because I'm a virgin now. Thank you for Donna." That's dear. That's dear.

Does immorality in Hollywood bother you?

Immorality bothers me anywhere. I don't know that Hollywood's more immoral than other places. Our im-

morality is splashed on the screen and in magazines and on *Hard Copy*, but do you think that we're more immoral than the people in New York? I don't know. I have a friend who likes to say that Los Angeles is the miniseries and New York is the book.

That's a good line; I wish I had said that. And I will in the future, I assure you.

Do you think nudity is as bad as violence?

I don't think anything is as bad as violence. Nudity never caused anyone's death as far as I know, except on *Dynasty*, when Joan Collins was making love to her husband and he died in a fit of passion.

Times seem so much more bleak now than they did when *Fantasy Island* originally aired, from 1978 to 1984. Don't you think that society could use a weekly lift from Mr. Roarke?

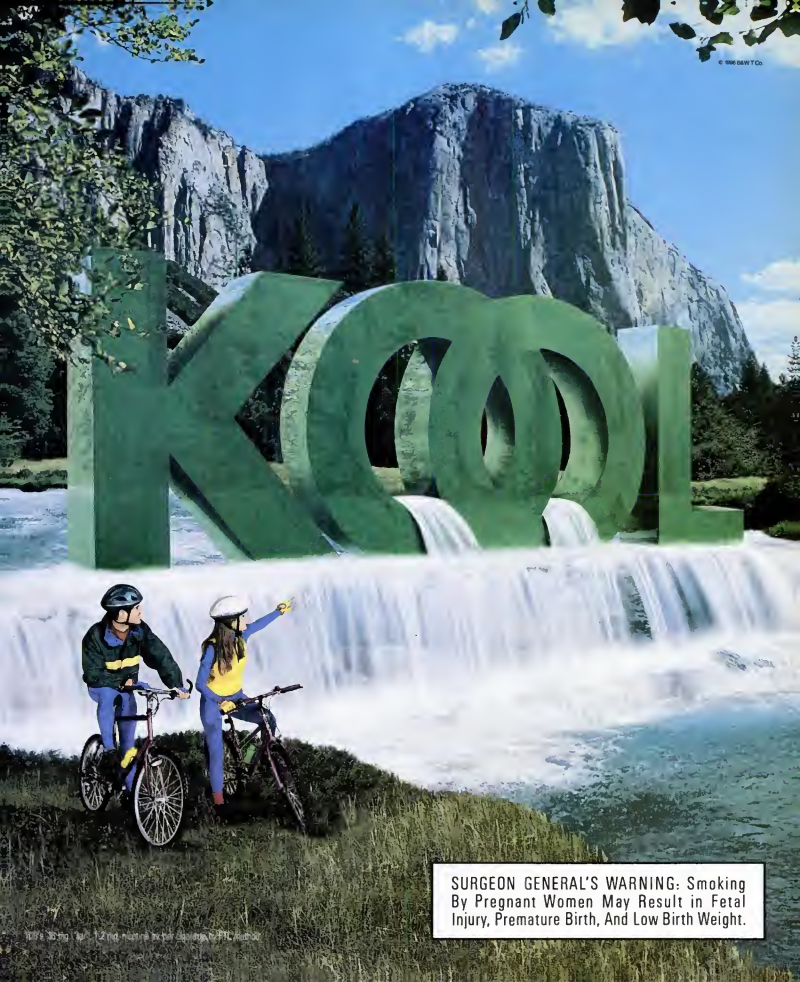
You know, I'm glad you said that, because I'm crucified whenever I mention the shows I really liked, like *Fantasy Island* and *Love Boat*. For some reason now, entertainment seems to be a dirty word. With what's going on in our country, people need a release valve. If there wasn't television, if there weren't funny comedies, or stupid comedies even, or shows like *Fantasy Island*, I think our suicide rate would be enormous. I really mean that.

Are your programs good for incarcerated people?

I think so. Not only incarcerated but people who can't go out of the house. We've gotten so many letters from incarcerated people and invalids who will never be able to take a trip on a boat, and *Love Boat's* taken them all over the world.

Why did you decide to write an autobiography?

The whole book is about following your dreams. You may not realize all your dreams, but if you get even part of your dream, it's better than no dream at all. You've got to follow your dream. And I did. ■



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girls

but the little understand

Saturday morning shows like *Saved by the Bell* and *Sweet Valley High* offer the most cruelly innocent depictions of teen-dom since the *Brady Bunch*. So that's why they're so popular.

By Elizabeth Gilbert.

Photograph by Jeremy Wolff.

All the leaves are brown, and the sky is gray. Outside, it's a winter's day in Los Angeles. Inside, on the set of *California Dreams*, it's a warm summer's evening, "somewhere on the California coast, by the ocean." A young girl and a young boy are hugging under the artificial starlight. It's a touching moment of teenage-American love, even though the huggers are actors in their early 20s.

"I'm scared, Tiffani," the boy says.

"You can't lose sight of your dreams, Jake," the girl says.

Then they kiss, and the live studio audience says, "Ooohhh...."

There are a few boys in this audience, but the larger (and louder) part of the crowd consists of girls bused in by NBC producers from schools, Girl Scout troops, and church groups in the area. My particular row is stocked with wriggling seventh-grade girls, each one suffering from a different deadly symptom of early adolescence: excessive height, excessive weight, braces, ecne, etc.

When the actor who plays Jake walks by, the audience shrieks as one worshipful chorus. Crew members on *California Dreams* wear earplugs to protect themselves from how piercingly every girl in the audience loves Jake. Jake wears a leather jacket. He's a bad boy with a pretty face and a heart of gold who owns a motorcycle, but plays the guitar and writes love poetry and even cries sometimes. Jake is definitely worth falling completely in love with.

"I watch him every Saturday," an anxious looking girl confides. "If I was Tiffani, I sure wouldn't go to college and leave Jake behind."

"But Tiffani wants to further her education to advance her position in society," I point out.

The girls roll their eyes at me like I'm their collective mother. Then the tallest girl tells me that she and her friends came to the show today with a "special class" from school.

"Which special class is that?" I ask.

"Self-esteem class!" they crow in unison.

"And what does this TV show have to do with self-esteem?" I ask.

They think about this.

Finally, the girl with all the braces says hesitantly, "Because it makes us happy?"

In 1988, someone at NBC noticed that the network was losing its audience of kids on Saturday mornings. Not the little kids, who were happy

to eat their Cocoa Puffs in front of any random image, but the bigger kids. Nobody knew exactly what the teens and pre-teens were doing with their weekend mornings, but they sure weren't watching enough TV anymore, and it was scary. So somebody at NBC talked to a producer named Peter Engel about it, and the next year, Mr. Engel unleashed *Saved by the Bell* on the Saturday morning lineup.

It was genius—a lightweight, live-action show about teens in high school, featuring fresh-faced young actors in impossibly innocent situations. (Everyone's innocence seems a little less possible since original *Saved by the Bell* cast member Elizabeth Berkley went on to star as the naked, greased-up, nipple-tugging Nomi in the appalling Joe Eszterhas vehicle *Showgirls*.) Still, you would have to go back to the beach movies of the 1950s to find such a simple, pure depiction of American youth as this. No sex, no drugs, no school-yard fights where someone gets slashed with a box-cutter, no desperate misery. Instead, in every episode, there is simply a Misunderstanding, which is then Resolved, resulting in a Lesson for everyone. While the cast, Menuzo-like, has been replaced a few times by younger clones, this basic formula remains true.

Recent *Saved by the Bell*: The New Class episode: Lindsay thinks her best friend Rachel is trying to steal her boyfriend Ryan. (Misunderstanding.) Rachel explains that she and Ryan are just friends. (Resolution.) Lindsay proclaims, "Jealousy is the pits. It can make you ect crazy. I'm sorry for not trusting my two best friends." (Lesson.)

The drama is interrupted occasionally to promote shampoo, cereal, and tampons.

"We're gents in the industry," Engel growled at me over the telephone. Engel talks like Kojak-era Telly Savalas. He even smells like cigar smoke over the phone. "We invented teen TV. We have a huge international following, because every kid in the world is just like the kids on the show."

The kids on the show are a popuier blonde girl, a popuier blond boy, a popuier brunette girl, a popuier brunet boy, a popuier black boy, a popuier Latine, and a popuier nerd. There is also a plaincast named Mr. Belding. He is popuier.

The show itself was so popuier that it spawned a family of imitators. After *Saved by the Bell* came *California Dreams*, which is just like *Saved by the Bell* except that the popuier high school friends are all in a band. Then came *Sweet Valley High*, which is just like *Saved by the Bell* except that the popuier blonde girl is actually popuier blonde twin girls. Then came *Hung Tina*, where the popuier high school friends are all on a basketball team. Finally, there came *Out of the Blue*, whose popuier high school friends exist within the confines of an equatic theme park.

Out of the Blue is the most disturbingly utopian. These kids don't ever seem to go to school, nor is it very clear what they're doing at this theme park, although they own lots of swimwear. While all these teen shows have sexy-but-virginal leading ladies, *Out of the Blue* has the sexiest star of all: The character of Veronica is played by the actress Veronica Blume, a young woman who—like many American teens—is a *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit model in her free time.

The networks bunch these shows together on Saturday morning like a pack of best friends after a sleepover, but nothing has touched the success of the original.

"*Saved by the Bell* owns the 9-14 demographic," Engel told me. "Teenagers all over the world love us."

I called my cousin Margaret, who is an actual teenager, and asked what she thought of Saturday morning teen TV. She said, "I would



rather pull out my own hair, one strand at a time, then watch any of those shows."

"Is your high school anything like these TV high schools?" I asked.

She said, "You gotta be kidding me."

Ironically, many of the actors starring on these high school shows never went to real high school themselves, since they were too busy starring on these high school shows. This raises the interesting question, What the hell do they know about high school?

Take Screech. Played by Dustin Diamond, Screech has been on *Saved by the Bell* for eight years. He is the Erkel-like character, a shrieking geek with a chicken's neck and goofy clothes. Screech harbors an unholly love for the principal, Mr. Belding, whom he showers with mysterious endearments like "my poor feathered chief" or "my winded sack of air."

"Everyone knows a Screech," Diamond told me in a surprising baritone. "There's a Screech in every school."

Except that this Screech is well-liked. I'm sorry to report that in my own high school, an unfortunate creature like Screech would



Pre-teen spirit: the audience at California Dreams.

In every episode of *Saved by the Bell* there is simply a Misunderstanding, which is then Resolved, resulting in a Lesson for everyone.

have been ritually tortured. Diamond himself couldn't possibly know the pain of the true geek, though, since he was educated on the set of *Saved by the Bell* by a private tutor who probably never shaved his head in a flushing toilet.

Sixteen-year-old Richard Lee Jackson, an actor on the new class of *Saved by the Bell*, is also tutored on set. I asked him what grade he was in right now. "I don't know, actually," he said. "I've wondered that myself."

Of course, the problem with joining a teen TV cast after you've finished high school is the embarrassment of playing a teenager while well into your 20s. "I'll never understand it," 23-year-old Michael Cade told me. Cade grew up in normal New Jersey, and plays popular Sly Winkle on *California Dreams*. "To be honest, I only signed a four-year contract because I was sure it wouldn't last. It's the stupidest show on earth, but kids seem to love it."

"The younger kids love our show because it represents something they wish for," explained Abbie Charette, a coproducer of *Sweet Valley High*. "Most of them are pre-teen girls, and this is what they hope high school will be like."

A recent issue of the *Sweet Valley High* fan-club newsletter, *The Oracle*, included a word search game with these hopeful words buried in the puzzle: BOYS, DANCE, PARTIES, SLEEPOVER, SHOPPING.... Teen gossip magazines spread the gospel of glee, too. One issue of *SuperTeen* featured a "SuperTeen Exclusive!" behind-the-scenes photo spread of *Sweet Valley High*. Every sentence ends in an exclamation point—"Brittany personalizes her dressing room by painting the walls *periwinkle blue!*"—cuing the reader to feel excitement about everything!

Charette continued. "We even get fan mail from little girls who can barely write yet. Our show is very female-driven. We provide strong female role models."

It might be a mistake to assert that a television show provides strong female role models simply because it provides females. While television has never presented a *drove* of inspiring female figureheads, at least there was a time when girls were offered the *Bionic Woman* (champion), *Nancy Drew* (intellectual), and *Wonder Woman* (goddess).

On the other hand, the stars of *Sweet Valley High* are gorgeous, blonde, size-6 identical twins with pushed-up boobs. One twin is naughty, one twin is nice. The naughty twin is sexual, but not smart. The nice twin is smart, but not sexual. Pick your role model, girls!

Peggy Orenstein, author of *SchoolGirls: Young Women, Self-Esteem, and the Confidence Gap*, refers to Saturday morning programming as "brainwash time." She says, "Kids at that age need to see real people

facing real situations. It's good escapism, but it boomerangs back on real teenagers as they age, making them feel even more isolated because their own lives aren't like that."

Still, the producers of current teen TV believe their product is harmless enough for any kid. They're particularly proud of the racial diversity of the characters (one of each!), although the minority roles aren't entirely revolutionary. On *California Dreams*, the only openly sexual girl is also the only Hispanic, a head-tossing, not-tempered diva named Lorena Costa.

On the set of *California Dreams*, I met Rosa, a young Mexican-American girl in the audience.

"Who's your favorite character?" I asked her.

"Lorena Costa."

"Why?"

"Because she's shy," Rosa said. "Just like me."

Lorena Costa is not shy at all. A fiery chiquita, she is the only damn girl on the show who isn't shy. But shy Rosa identifies with her, because Lorena Costa is all she's got. This is sad, but it's still somehow encouraging that, despite all the brainwash, the girls in the audience have rich imaginations. Like shy Rosa, they see hidden features in bland characters.

Another sixth-grader told me she loved Tiffani—the blonde bimbo on the show.

"Why do you like Tiffani?" I asked.

"She reminds me of my big sister. Very intelligent."

Still another sixth-grader said, "I like Jake best."

"Why? Because he's cute?"

"No," she said cryptically, "because he cares about me."

Kids are innately sensitive. They deserve better than these shows, although they certainly seem happy with what they've been given. This was a good *California Dreams* audience. They said "ooohhh" at the kissy parts and laughed at the funny parts. During breaks in the shooting, they sang the show's theme song ("Don't wake me up if I'm dreaming... goes the sunny refrain"). And they shrieked for Jake. The audience's baby-sitter was an NBC employee who answered questions from the crowd with exquisite boredom.

"Why are the sets so big?" one girl asked him.

"That's right, sweetheart," he droned. "Everything looks bigger on TV. Next question?"

The kids were quiet only during the last shot of the day. Beneath fake stars, somewhere on the California coast, the characters of Sly, Jake, and Tiffani said their final emotional good-byes before heading to college. In the live studio audience, the geeky young girls were still and breathless, watching. Real tears glittered prettily on their eyelashes. It was impossible to imagine what any one girl was thinking, but, from every angle, they all looked like starlets. ●

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trust no one

A healthy streak of paranoia, contends Jack Womack, helps explain the mass cultdom of *The X-Files*.

In Philip K. Dick's novel *Time Out of Joint*, a man pausing before a hot dog stand watches as the structure dissolves in air, leaving behind a slip of paper that reads HOT DOG STAND. Both character and reader are left disoriented; the soothing chord of reality has been transposed without warning, slipping into atonal decay. Few television programs have even tried, much less wanted, to render this mood (certain sequences of *Twin Peaks*, prior to its producers and writers being abducted by aliens, come to mind); *The X-Files* captures it consistently.

When Chris Carter first pitched *The X-Files* to Fox in 1992, he intended to do nothing more than what he still aims to do today. "We're basically trying to put you on a roller coaster and scare the pants off you," says the show's 34-year-old creator and executive producer. But at its best, *The X-Files* does considerably more.

The premise is simple. Each week, FBI Special Agents Fox Mulder (David Duchovny) and Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson) investigate crimes or events that appear to have no rational explanation. Mulder tends to accept improbable solutions, Scully doesn't; either might be right. The closer they get to the truth, the farther away it rushes; and when each episode ends, each mystery remains, in the minds of the characters if not always in the mind of the audience. "If we pretended to explain the unexplainable every week," says Carter, "we'd be kidding ourselves."

In all of drama there are but a few plots, and this setup has been used more than once before (think *Kolchak: The Night Stalker*). But there are reasons both obvious (good scripts, fine acting, excellent soundtrack, outstanding cinematography) and subtle that *The X-Files* is so popular at this particular moment. First, Scully and Mulder are two marvelous characters—bright, likable, non-stereotypical, willing to make use of circumstance rather than allow it to use them. Also, *The X-Files* is not as distractingly meaningful as, say, *The Twilight Zone* too often was. "I've gone out of my way not to deliver any big messages about existence," explains Carter. "There are certain personal

philosophies of mine that do come across. You'll see them in the phrases that appear throughout the show: *Trust no one; I want to believe*. Like Mulder, I'm a nonreligious person looking for a religious experience."

But when we look closer at this particular hot dog stand, what do we see? These millennial days of ours are darker than we might wish, and *The X-Files* mirrors contemporary fears of the mass audience better than anything else currently on the tube. Through its use of paranormal themes, *The X-Files* readily taps into humanity's fondness for the strange and the bizarre. Most keenly, it taps into our attraction to monsters, whether they reside in the mind, in the woods, in a test tube, or on a distant planet. Those responsible for the show understand that sometimes monsters

are appointed, or even elected to office. Was Nixon, after all, any less appalling, or appealing, than either Tooms—an ageless character who eats human livers to survive—or Fluke Man, a half-human, half-slithe parasite worm? This aspect of the show doesn't just hit a nerve, it hits the spinal column.

In discussing the American public's general distrust of its own government, Carter points out that "these attitudes have been prevalent since Watergate. People ask if in the absence of the U.S.S.R. we haven't been doing a bit of navel-gazing, becoming more paranoid. I imagine that's true to some extent." The show slyly comments upon and plays with that paranoia by using nightmarish images that were until recently held dear exclusively by members of the radical fringe (militias, conspiratologists, etc.)—black helicopters, mysterious body implants, growth tanks containing alien-human hybrids. By blending a deep

suspicion of governmental intentions with the charms of the Fortean universe (after Charles Fort, who in the first third of this century wrote better about the inexplicable than anyone else, before or since), *The X-Files* not only entertains but offers to a broad audience the concept (call it *alternity*) that there coexists with our world, if only in our minds, a parallel one, a world where the funny stuff really happens: Toads rain from the sky, elephants appear out of thin air to wander down back roads in Idaho, and the Blue Beret UFO Retrieval Team takes out innocents by the score while on the track of those who would reveal the Truth. And once this concept is taken for granted, the show ups the ante by asking if we can be sure which world we're still in.

Too often in this third season, surrealism has slept in the backseat while a succession of paranormally challenged teens have taken the wheel. (All great TV shows, like thoughtless lovers, one day break your heart. They never mean to.) Still, the best episodes of *The X-Files* make you remember back to the time you were afraid to know what went on in the basement when you weren't down there to look. ■



Agents of fortune: Gillian Anderson as Dana Scully and, below, David Duchovny as Fox Mulder.



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*Often imitated, never duplicated:
Despite the copycat onslaught, Ricki Lake
remains the queen of youth-talk.*

Last season, daytime television was lousy with trashy talk shows desperate to cannibalize Ricki Lake's profitably youthful market share. Now all but a hard-core handful have bitten the dust. Mark Schone chronicles the twilight of the Ricki clones. Photographs by Brian Smale.



A tiny transvestite stands shivering on a New York City sidewalk. In his stacks and blue beo del, blond hair and blonder ambition, "Rusty" is Madonna circa Sean, but Madonna never waited for a limo in two feet of snow. Then Rusty's friend Robert appears, carrying a sweated lap-dog. Robert takes Rusty's bag and steers him to the right car, nearby all along. Just before the door closes and they head downtown, someone shouts, "We love you, Madonna!"

Maybe I did the right thing braving the city's deepest snow in 18 years to catch a taping of *Carnie*. The guests, if Rusty and Robert are typical, seem interesting, and the star herself really wants my company. She recorded a phone message imploring the faithful to appear. "Hi, this is Carnie. We're taping two shows today, at three and six. Anyone who stays for both gets a free dinner!"

A Shempette with short dark hair stands guard at *Carnie*'s roll-down gate, a block from the Hudson River on the western edge of Manhattan. "We've got a bet going with *Richard Bay*," the woman confides over her clipboard. "They said we couldn't get a show done. But we got 87 for the first show." Of course, they had to raid David Letterman's standby line to get that 87, but 32 of those stuck around for the second show and the free food.

"It was pizza, I think," says a middle-aged security guy as he waves a metal detector at me, "and it's long gone." There's nothing to do but wait for the studio to open. The lobby fills with young people of every hue, skewed toward the brown and black, since that's who live in this town. We have half an hour to ogle three huge posters of Miss Wilson, fill out ticket request cards, and suck down free coffee.

The *Carnie* set, into which we herd at quarter to six, looks like a TV psych's bathroom. It's a flimsy nightmare of Greco-eclectic facades, with pinks and purples and glitter and cherubs. It's also as cold as outer space, a bummer for the four score of us who left our warm homes to be here.

"You guys are great!" yells a female Augustus Gloop, bounding onto the stage clutching a cordless black mike. She tells us how wonderful we are for coming, and New Yorkers are really great because if you ask for the time they'll tell you what your problem is, and that's what they want us to do, they want us to speak up, because we're one third of the show. She asks us to give ourselves a hand, then tells us that's not good enough. "And we really like it if you"—she demonstrates, her legs pumping—"stomp your feet." She tells us she needs our minds, she needs us to ask questions, she needs us to wave our hands. Most important, she needs us to turn off our cell phones and beepers.

After a club-mix interlude of "Macarena," cheerleader number two comes out. He wants us to make more noise. "Let's hear your ooohs!" "Ooooh." "Let's hear your aaaaahs!" "Aaaah." "Let's hear your whoo..." And he's flummoxed, since this is more of a whoot crowd, but we comply. Then he leaves, and two more people begin to circulate in the crowd passing out mood-enhancing Hershey's Kisses. With the chocolate carrot comes the stick: Take off your coats, even though you're freezing. It'll warm up when the lights come on.

Finally, at 6:20, "America's Talk Show Queen" is announced. *Carnie* Wilson enters, in flocked velvet, looking like a badly stuffed couch. She

grabs the mike, says "hi" and "thanks," and reminds us to get involved. "Believe me," she adds, "with these people, you're not going to have problems asking questions."

The tape begins to roll. The first show's topic was "I Want to Have Madonna's Baby," hence Rusty. We've drawn "I Saw a Ghost!" Not an immediate hit, but we're game. Reading from the TelePrompTer, Wilson introduces Lillian, who says she's met hundreds of ghosts, including a little boy named George who bounces a ball up and down her hair. A woman pops up with the obvious question, "If there are hundreds of ghosts in your house," she demands, "why don't you move?" The whoot-o-meter jumps. A homegirl follows, asking Lillian to put up or shut up. "I lost my Guess watch. Can you tell me where it is?" Louder yucks.

The nervous, blonde, thirtyish woman in charge of everything charges out at the end of this segment. She's mad at us. "When you laugh, it's like you're mocking these people. They really believe this stuff happened to them!" Invited to a talk show, forbidden to mock. Someone's a born vibe-killer.

We're not even permitted to ridicule the next guest, who's begging for it. She's a young woman from Florida, 20 going on 12, who opens a black bag and plops a doll at her feet. It's three feet tall, with black hair and blank eyes, and she says it's possessed. It stares at us, legs splayed. Wilson asks spooked: "Don't you have a feeling in your stomach, right here?" Maybe she means the pizza.

Then, three older women tell us about their dead sons and mothers, but only one of them cries, and by the time the last one tells us her dead mom ordered her to go to a bar and meet a man named Eddie, minds are wandering. Finally, one of a group of Puerto Rican homies with patterned hair unclashes at the far left side of the crowd and beckons for the mike. "Yo," he says, "I don't know about no ghosts, but" and here he looks at the strangely frozen doll girl, "I just want to tell Christina she's got some fine legs." Whoops all around. His friends fall out. They probably put him up to it, but I would've given him five dollars to speak up half an hour earlier. After sitting through one of these things, you understand why people say this kind of shit on talk shows. They've been waiting around for hours, pumped up on sugar, not allowed to use the bathroom. They're bored.

When Wilson signs off with her trademark, "Have a gorgeous day," we're ordered to stand up and dance, and the more she dance the better chance we have of getting on TV. "Dead fish don't get on TV!" barks Ms. Gloop. We dance like live fish and it's fun, more fun than the old white ghost ladies,



Carnie, the most successful of the newbies, barely managed a two rating.



anyway. As we gather our coats and get ready to leave, one of the regulars says to a producer, "When you get some comedians, call me." Then we file out the back exit into the snow, never having used the bathroom.



Hoofing it at NATPE: from left, Tempestt Bledsoe, Richard Bey, and Jerry Springer.

In the fall of 1995, young people who liked talk shows could get bedsores from watching them. *Ricki Lake* and her firstborn, *Charles Perez*, were joined by a half-dozen clones: *Danny!*, *Carnie*, *Gabrielle*, *Tempestt*, and *Mark Walberg*, while more grizzled hosts like Jenny Jones had already ridden *Ricki*'s style to higher ratings. All these developments can be blamed on one man.

In the beginning, Garth Ancier begat Fox, in all its beetle-browed, late-'80s glory. During his three-year tenure as the youngest program chief at a TV network, the pasty Princeton grad found an untapped market in so-called "urban" viewers. Meaning that while old white ghost ladies watched *Murder, She Wrote*, wunderkind Ancier targeted kids, men, blacks, Latinos, and city dwellers. Fox had a hit with the sex and poop jokes of *Married...With Children*, and gave up on smart stuff like *The Tracey Ullman Show*.

As talk shows grew in popularity, Ancier realized his young followers didn't have one they could call their own. After leaving Fox to start an independent production company, he resolved to find an *Oprah* for the Baby Bust.

In the spring of 1992, Ancier anointed Jane Pratt the talk world's Super Deb, only to find the *Sassy* magazine founder likably stiff, lost without her cue cards, and finally horrified by the whole tawdry deal. Pratt limped off to cable and nursed her street cred, and while she was killing time at Lifetime, Ancier found his chosen one.

Ricki Lake was almost a famous actress once. In her first film role, playing a lovable chubbster in John Waters's *Hairspray*, she made fat empowering. While Lake may have been a good role model for low-self-esteem teens, there weren't many lead roles for 200-pound ladies. When she got dumped from *China Beach*, with her \$750,000 mortgage begging for nourishment, Lake turned talk host.

The team that falied with Pratt succeeded with Lake, feeding her the same tired topics In the same "new" *Jane* wrapping. Instead of "My Daughter's a Ho," it was "My Mom Says I'm a Ho." Teens began to notice by the end of the first season, the summer of '94, when ten weeks of vacation filled couches with budding *Ricki* fans. By the time *Ricki* started taping in the fall, Lake was a star.

The first pretender to Lake's throne was Charles Dabney. Dabney first appeared on TV screens as the date of the gay roommate, Norman Korpi, on MTV's 1992 *The Real World*. His first paying gig was behind the scenes; a job as associate producer at version one of the *The Jane Pratt Show* (his connection: Ancier, who also gave him a dog named Romeo). When Pratt moved to Lifetime, Dabney went out the other door with producer Gail Steinberg to the embryonic *Ricki*.

Dabney, realizing everyone will eventually have a talk show, decided it was his turn. He raised some money and made a pilot. He began using the name Perez, adopting his Peruvian mom's maiden name in what many thought a cynical grab for "urban" eyeballs. Affable, charming, model-handsome, Perez got the job, though he never displayed any real skill at squelching a room full of whooters. As a talk show host, he made a great flight attendant.

Apres Perez, the deluge. When he hit the airwaves in spring '95, there were already a dozen youthtalk competitors in development. They arrived in a wave later fall. In September '87, only four talkers competed for space; eight years later, there were two dozen, eight of them freshly hatched—*Stephanie Miller*, *Rolonda*, and all the *Ricki* clones. Shit was thrown against the wall, and, as will happen, shit slid off.

Some of the Lake manqués were just bad. Dick Clark saw ex-Cosby kid Tempestt Bledsoe in an *Entertainment Tonight* whatever-happened-to clip (according to her Web-page bio), found her "fresh" and "natural," and gave her a talk show. Elsewhere in cyberspace, one can read the AOL lumen's take on *Tempestt*: "Get her whiny ass off my TV." "She is da wurst."

The other ex-child star in the freshman class of '95 was widely proclaimed the best of the lot. Though Danny Bonaduce seemed addicted to retracing the same 12 steps—the perils of early fame, the folly of drugs—his fatal habit may have been irony. He was too smart for this stuff.

Rolonda knew what she was doing, but got buried in a post-midnight slot in the crucial New York market. Mediocre *Carnie Wilson* was sloppy seconds to begin with, since both she and Melissa Rivers had auditioned unsuccessfully for Lake's job in '93.



The industry seems oblivious to the fact that good-for-you *Gabrielle* has fared no better in the ratings than down-and-dirty *Richard Bey*.

There were just too many shows and not enough viewers. Talk shows aired all day in some markets, opposite each other, upside each other. They cannibalized each other's ratings. *Carnie*, the most-watched of all the new programs, barely inched above a two rating, or some two million households viewing. The clones even cut into Herself's action: *Ricki's* ratings fell ten percent.

Everyone was courting the same viewers the same way. Part of the Ander-Lake "urban" formula was an upfront appeal to black audiences, with the expectation that people of color would tune in to see their own, while the white kids would come along because black=street=hip. Talk became the *MacNeil/Lehrer* of the hip-hop nation.

The urbanization of talk could mean something as innocuous as the "Go Ricki!" chant or post-Arsenio Dog Pound woofing on *Richard Bey*. It could also inspire laughable sights like the last-ditch promos *Reed* aired last fall. After some action poses, and a little *Solid Gold* dancing, Mr. Dabney could be seen perched stiffly astride a motorcycle, a swarthy Al Gore in a crisp new leather jacket. "Charles," insisted the voice-over, "has got it going on."

The real benefits went to such established shows as *Jerry Springer* and *Jenny Jones*, which aped *Ricki's* obsession with relationships and moved further downmarket. Jones reinvented herself as an inner-city icon. New York's Channel 9 began double-running her show, with a second *Jenny* at 11 PM., versus the white male roadblock of Dave, Jay, and Ted. Miss Jones got her own "Go Jenny!" chant, and the hip-hop magazine *The Source* paid her the ultimate tribute: "This sexy old white lady makes me want to walk into a Pizza Hut with an automatic weapon and spray innocent women and children!"

Jones's guests took their gats on house calls instead. In March of '95, Jonathan Schmitz of Pontiac, Michigan, shot Scott Amedure for "surprising" him with an on-air profession of love. The producer's briefing note to Jones had read, "I think Jon is going to die when he sees it's Scott."

The competition drove *Jenny*, *Ricki*, and all the clones to extremes, and as advertisers paled and sated viewers pushed away from the table, William Bennett seized the opportunity. The former Reagan official began his crusade against filth in talk, knowing many shows would die by February for sheer lack of breathing space. More than six months prior to the beginning of the Bennett jihad, station managers were already assailing syndicators with complaints and concerns about Talk.

But Bennett and Senators Sam Nunn and Joseph Lieberman prattled on, held forth, issued statements. Advertisers began to back away, aided by Bennett's second media stunt, the outing of companies advertising at time on talk shows. While Bennett was naming names, he urged major advertisers—some of whom were also GOP contributors—to pull their commercials.

Finally, *Carnie* bit the dust, then *Danny* and *Stephanie Miller*, then *Charles*, *Gabrielle*, and *Mike & Maty*. *Tempest* hung on through the strength of black viewers and a nice time period in New York. The original talker, Phil Donahue, having lost his New York outlet and many choice time periods, decided to end his run at 29 years. *Geraldo Rivera* took the high road, saying his show would adopt a ten-point de-sleazing platform, a Talk Show Bill of Rights. He went to Bosnia to prove his virtue (and bore his core audience).

By NATPE (National Association of Television Program Executives), the yearly convention at which the TV industry assembles to plan the next season, no one was talking Talk. The few projects floated were aggressively sanitary—celebritychatters like former *A Current Affair* host Maureen O'Boyle, or the eerily cheerful *Crook and Chase*, formerly chewing cud on TNN; a doctor; a wholesome blonde mother-daughter duo. The industry seemed oblivious to the fact that good-for-you *Gabrielle* had fared no better in the ratings than the down-and-dirty *Richard Bey*—or that Oprah herself had shed viewers when she stopped sleazing.

This was all bad news for Mindy Cohn. As proof that anyone fat, friendly, and familiar could get work during the feast year of youth talk,

Buena Vista started building a vehicle for the chubby chick from *The Facts of Life*. Post-youth purge, Buena Vista shelved Ms. Cohn. Meanwhile, far above the killing fields, Jane Pratt now lobs air-kisses at celebs on VH1.

At up to a dozen guests per episode, two dozen talk shows taping six

times weekly for 30 weeks equals lots of guests—more than 50,000, in fact. That perennial chin-scratcher "Where do they find these people?" could've been amended, during the talk-bloated 1995-1996 TV season, to "Where do they find so many of these people?"

The answer's easy. If you're not on TV, you don't matter. You probably don't even exist. Americans have decided they have an inalienable right to celebrity, and 60 minutes of it, minus commercials, beats 15 any day. Fifty thousand talk-show geeks is a small town in a land of 250 million attention-seekers.

Angela Viggiano discovered *Ricki* during that certain summer of '94. As we sit in the den of her Sag Harbor, New York, home, watching a *Ricki* episode about raising kids, the 17-year-old points when Miss Lake adopts a lot of concern. "See that? She has a very expressive face." Lake seems to care about her guests, thinks Viggiano, which is hardly the sense she gets from some other hosts. She stopped watching *Richard Bey* when Bey made nasty comments about Lake and *Carnie Wilson's* weight—Viggiano's a little larger herself.

Her attempts to become a guest on a talk show stem from her desire to get into show business. She spends hours each day kneading her online accounts, sometimes Prodigy, sometimes AOL, browsing through the vague, meager listings for actresses and models, talking with other aspiring celebs. Her questions in one chat session led the National Talk Show Guest Registry to send her an application. She sent them \$32.

Formed three years ago, the Registry lists the names and bios of 2,300 guest wannabes. In addition to Viggiano, there's a bisexual pro wrestler, a man who claims to have the most fake IDs in the world, and a woman who says aliens performed both sex and surgery on her.

Viggiano first decided she could get on talk shows by talking about a recently busted relationship. Before she was Registered, she called 1-800 GO RICKI and 1-800 2 CARNIE religiously. "I wanted to do one like, 'Boyfriends



Angela Viggiano, 17, yearns for talk-show infamy.

can wreck your life." Her boyfriend complaints were "not specific enough," according to producers. Now she's aiming for an episode along the lines of "I'll Do Anything to Get Into Show Business." To date, Viggiano's had no bites.

And compared to other would-be guest-meat, Angela Viggiano has little to offer. She has dysfunction, but not spectacularly so. She may have talent as an actress, but as Angela she has a shy, halting way of presenting herself, too quiet for the garish needs of talk. She can hardly bear to aim her light blue eyes at a questioner one-on-one. She has only her desire for attention.

Viggiano's parents are indulgent of their daughter's taste for glitz; in fact, it seems genetic. Mom watches *Jenny Jones* every night with Angela, and is a longtime *Oprah* devotee. On the walls around the family computer are photos showing her parents' own brushes with fame—mom and dad with Don Ho, with Crystal Gayle; dad with Charo, signed "Cuchi Cuchi!" There's a *Shrimers* red fez in a glass case in the hall, a box full of Avon cards (pink with white bunnies) in the office. Angela's yearnings suddenly seem near-fetched.

Like most Americans, Viggiano is cut off from the mechanics of celebrity. She's not going to get any acting jobs from online listings, or from placing an ad in the *East Hampton Star*. She sheepishly confirms that yes, one guy from an online ad did want her to disrobe. She doesn't know how things work. "You live in the city," she says. "Do you know Ricki?"

For every Angela Viggiano on the Registry, there's an equal and opposite Lynette Louise. Louise's signal virtue as a talk show guest, she freely admits, is that she freely admits things. She was, for example, an escort—"It was only for ten customers' worth, just enough to get us on

our feet again." Her eight children (she is the birth mother of only two) were variously sexually, emotionally, and physically abused by persons inside and outside the family. She was in a wrestling video. She currently tells stories at children's parties in Houston, averaging \$100 a pop.

Almost all publicity is good publicity to Louise. Talk shows are just another source of work and revenue, the Registry a means to that end. But then again, her life is so sensational that the talk shows found Louise before she found the Registry.

Louise's third marriage dissolved around 1989 amid charges her husband had sexually abused their oldest daughter. Broke, a newly single parent, Louise began to scrape for cash. She expanded her résumé to include stand-up comedy, a CD of self-penned country jazz, and "escorting."

Living in a ramshackle house in Toronto's most affluent suburb, den mother to a patchwork brood of eight, many of them special-needs kids, Louise couldn't have been more different from her neighbors. She was forced to move several times. Townspeople sniped at Louise for taking custody of an unrelated girl amid allegations that the girl's stepfather had molested her.

The simple fact of her family attracted the media. In 1990, a filmmaker at York University in Toronto began shooting a documentary on Louise and her brood. Not long after, Louise began making

The talk audience skews toward folks who're home during the day—the unemployed, women, minorities, the young, the infirm.

her own film in concert with two other York students. She launched a song-and-dance tour of North American prisons, trailed by Canada's answer to *A Current Affair*, which led to hosting a show on Canada's Life cable network called *Cross Country Cookin'*. Inevitably, Louise passed through the valley of talk shows, and she feared no evil.

It's hard to tell where Louise and her two oldest daughters fall on the function/dysfunction curve. Sitting in a diner drinking coffee, the kids are bright, poised, and funny, and full of praise for Mom. Each woman wears a necklace that spells out her name in tiny metal tiles: L-Y-N-E-T-T-E; T-S-A-R-A; B-R-A-D-E-S-S-A. Tsara, the 21-year-old sex-abuse survivor, has her two-year-old-son Jory in tow, and another child pending. Several times Jory will leap into my lap and bear-hug my neck. "There's no man around," says Louise, matter-of-factly.

They tell the story of their talk-show careers, often simultaneously, giggling frequently. While Louise was out of town in 1994 shooting *Cross Country Cookin'*, a family friend named Donna Devlin asked Brandessa and sister Khia to appear on *Shirley*, Canada's *Oprah*. A producer at *Shirley*, Devlin claimed a guest had fallen through for a show called "When Gossip Can Ruin Your Life." She knew the sisters had been victims of gossip—Khia was the scandalous hijacked child. Would they like to be on TV?

As the taping began, Brandessa gave a long introductory speech about

how her town had ostracized her family, and how when Khlyia moved into their home in flight from alleged abuse, neighbors had called Louise a baby-snatcher and a cult leader. "I paused for breath," remembers Brandessa, "and Shirley said, 'So, your sister called you a bitch.'"

Once the two sisters saw where things were headed, they rebelled, sitting down next to each other and linking hands. During a segment break, "family friend" Devlin stormed up angrily. "She pulled us apart, and said, 'Don't hold hands!'" The girls started crying as soon as they'd left the studio.

Not long after Shirley, Louise married a Texan she'd met through the prison tour and moved her clan to Pasadena, Texas, a lower-middle-class refinery burb of Houston. Her fourth marriage ended after a week. Her son Dar decided to test his new dad by sitting on the toilet seat, and dad failed the test. Louise and her dependents were living in a van, then in Khlyia's tiny flat, when Donna Devlin contacted them again.

Devlin had moved to New York to work on *Carnie*. According to Louise, she called to say she hated her job, and had decided the only way she could deal was by faking everything. What she wanted, of course, was to do the same gossip topic all over again. Wooed by the free trip to New York, and the offer of \$600, Louise, Tsara, and Brandessa accepted.

This time they knew what to expect. Devlin rehearsed the team over the phone. When they arrived in New York, she handed them scripts to memorize. Brandessa and Tsara followed their lines expertly. Brandessa describes the content of same as "100 percent bullshit," an ersatz bitchfest between feuding sibs. Louise, who'd shown up in New York late, says she wasn't given a script and essentially told the truth. For example: Louise confessed to turning tricks, while the girls, as scripted, pretended Louise had entertained the Johns in front of them. Everybody got paid.

"It's just wrestling," Louise has decided. The only ones harmed are those who don't know it's wrestling. "What's really dangerous," she says, "is somebody who would look to talk shows to solve their problems." One of the more pernicious side effects on the war on talk, however, is that more shows feel obliged to solve problems each day.

The do-good virus hasn't spared the leading name in youth talk. But at a typical taping, *Ricki's* inability to advance the social good becomes apparent before he breach the de rigueur metal detector. "If you have any guns or knives on you," says a *Ricki* underling, "give them to us now, and we'll give them back at the end of the show. Give them back?"

The show's studios are upstairs in a midtown Manhattan office building. We're in a carpeted holding pen, the kind of suite motivational speakers rent at the Hilton. There are twice as many supplicants as plowed through the snow for *Carnie*, but the crowd is just as youthful and statistically representative of Nueva York. We sit and watch TV. The video is "Seven Tips on How to Be a Great Audience Member": "Be Funny"; "Say Something Outrageous"; "Put Someone in Their Place." An example illustrates each commandment, but all the examples are the same: Stand up and snap. "You ain't all that, girlfriend."

The tape stops abruptly. One of the producers wants to tell us today's menu. "We're going to do a little different *Ricki* Lake show today." Apprehension. "There's not going to be any yelling and shouting." Disappointment. "There's not going to be any 'You ain't all that.'" The bottom falls out. All that's what we're here for, but today we're going to reap the insights of "Ricki, Help Me Raise My Baby." Amid groans, a Tennessee voice calls out, "Capitol Hill got to you, didn't they?" The voice comes from a man in a suit, leader of a University of Tennessee, Knoxville, clique here to razz freaks while in town job-hunting. A less nuanced critique erupts behind me. "Boring topic," says Kella Vera, anchoring a line of Latinas.

We fill out a questionnaire, a multiple choice on how to solve common child-care problems. They funnel us into the studio by number, like an airline, but the audience coordinator chooses our seats. The count is past 140 before the place fills up. I find myself in front of Vera's posse once again.

"How many of you have kids?" asks Lake, when she appears post-warm-up. Half the hands go up. "Good, you're going to have some questions, right?" She says she's into today's topic because she's thinking about having kids. She knows we came for fireworks, and while this is looking like a health or home-ec class, she assures us it's going to be a good show.

The first two guests talk about how their kids won't stop crying no matter what. A woman from *Parenting* magazine gives her advice in long, looping soliloquies, sort of the way Jerry Garcia sounds if you don't like the Dead.

"Boring," says Vera, at the first break.

"Boring," says her friend. Throughout the show, she and her friends compensate with sotto voce swipes at the guests, though they seem to enjoy the goofiest whiteness on parade, the author of a self-help book about brats. But Vera's finally too fierce, as she proves by scolding the cute baby videos that intro and outro each segment.



Lynette Louise and members of her remarkable brood

"Boring," concludes Vera at the end of the taping. She and friends stroll toward the elevators, close on the heels of the Tennessees. As the college kids exit, debating the relative merits of *Rolonda* and *Ricki*, they rag on the member of their group whose job it was to procure tickets. "It's not my fault," she snorts.

Later, on the phone, Vera says she likes *Jenny* and *Ricki*, and wants *Tampestt* put out of her misery. She's 26 and works in the billing department of an armored-car firm in New Jersey, as do half the friends she drags to tapings. Vera's crew has been to *Richard Bay* and *Montal*, and they've been to *Ricki* three times. *Montal* was the best, she says, and *Bay* was fun because they brought out drag queens at the end. This was the worst of her three *Rickis*. What did she want to see? "Some violence," she responds, laughing.

"I stink," says Jerry Springer.

The former mayor of Cincinnati plucks strawberries from a three-foot pile of fruit and cheese. Across a brass railing, he gazes at a sunken dance floor, where a suit-and-ponytail cover band teaches conventioners the Electric Slide at a boozing-and-vomiting volume.

Springer's referring to his recently released solo album, *Dr. Talk*, a vanity disc of country songs. Never again, he promises. "I used up all my goodwill on this one. If I do another one, people will think I'm seriously trying to be a singer."

Springer is keeping his day job, which is hosting a middle-of-the-pack talk show slammed by cultural Cromwells for its sissae. Being a balasguar talk host means attending the NATPE convention, and turning up for parties like this one to mingle with the station managers who buy his program.

But at 1996's NATPE gathering, held in Las Vegas for the second straight year, the hot party is elsewhere. King World, syndicators of *Oprah* and *Jeopardy!*, has the Village People; Multimedia, Springer's boss, has a clique of maitre d's covering "Y.M.C.A." Maybe it's a sign of the times. Multimedia invented the TV talk show, made Donohue a national star in the 70s, and its slogan is still "We're Talking Entertainment." But few people came to Vegas to talk about that kind of entertainment.

The town itself also seems afflicted with the national plague of seamliness. You still navigate electronically—just remember what color your hotel is, and look for green or purple in 28 stories of neon. But the sleazy glamour is gone. Driving down the Strip, when smoke rises in the distance and the traffic slows, the rubberneckers are ogling not some multi-car pileup but a fake sea battle, with pirates and cannons, that erupts every 90 minutes outside Treasure Island. Vegas is now Orlando with slots.

Though it, too, resembles a theme park, the NATPE convention thankfully retains an Old Vegas air of high-rotar hubris mixed with glit-edged desperation. You can line up to have your picture taken with Regis and Kathie Lee, and watch while flashbuds pin their pupils back for an hour straight, or snub the likes of *The Wonder Years* grad Jason Hervey, who's signed on for a '90s version of *Hae Haw*. At NATPE, strange collisions obey only the laws of celebrity, ending always in photo ops. Dan Aykroyd poses with Hammer, a Texas League wrestler. Video psychic Linda Gordon presses cheeks with Jeanne Cooper, with a man in dachshund costume, with anyone. Hulk Hogan and Randy Savage stroll the halls in wrestling garb, unmolested, while Ed Begley, Jr., now hosting an eco-series for a no-name firm, chooses saerscrak, duck shoes, and a bag of popcorn. When he drops a keel, he picks it up.

The stars revolve through some 400,000 square feet of floor space at the Sands Expo Convention Center. Companies like Paramount have booths bigger than tract homes, while fingerlings like Gay Entertainment Television lurk deep in the warren of the fly-by-night, three-walls-and-a-fax-machine. Outside the Sands, about the arriving limos, Gerald's name graces a massive, unilronic hot-air balloon.

Last year the industry cloned *Ricki*; this year it's *Regis* and *Kathie Lee*. You can buy live talk or an odd-couple host team or both. The odd-est pairing has to be ex-Hollywood Square Jim J. Bullock and ex-televangelist—and ex-wife of Jim Bakker—Tammy Faye Massnar, whose fluffy chatter is already in test-run mode and faring poorly. Bullock

and Massnar ara, tharafora, continuously, desperately available.

Pugged into a velveteen pantsuit, Massnar sets down her chocolata chip cookie to talk. A decade after the Scandal, her burnished-copper face is still rimmed with makeup. Thick mascara turns her lashes into black petals and accents-har eyes' cornflower blue. She is so sweet, so manifestly guileless, that it's hard to believe this tiny woman ever ran a larcaneous empire. Now she's doing a talk show. Is this a godly pursuit?

"They know I won't do anything that conflicts with my Christian testimony." This testimony probably includes admonitions against sodomy, and Jim J. Bullock is an uncloseted homosexual. "I don't think of him as gay. I just think of him as another person that God loves."

Yet Massnar doesn't enjoy the game that employs her. She doesn't consume talk, because "I don't like to watch people hurting each other. I've been hurt so much that it's too painful to watch people hurting each other." The erstwhile victim portrays herself as victim. Though poor ratings may doom Messner, she's an ideal talk show host. (A month later, God will tell Messner to leave the show.)

Tammy Faye Massnar included, talk's freshman class is small compared to last year. The big news is Rosie O'Donnell, whose face looms sphinx-

"When Bill Bennett talks about 'the dark side of life,' says Mark Walberg, 'he means that in more than one way.'"

size outside the convention hall. She's signed with Warner Bros. to do entertainment talk, celebrity backscratching à la Merv circa '74, or Reece any day of the week. The stations love it. At the Warner booth, entrance is by appointment only.

Only two of 1995's newbies have returned for NATPE '96. *Mark Walberg* and *Tampestt* are still slugging. Walberg's face is all over town, as omnipresent as Buddy Hackett and ads for seven-buck steaks. Every bus shelter in Vegas sports a photo of Walberg squatting beneath the slogan "Same guy, better talk." Inside the hall itself, a 25-by-50-foot Walberg poster hangs above the entrance to the convention floor.

In person, Walberg has to wear a name tag. There's a little gold star and the word "Star" next to his name, lest he blend into the other blue suits at the New World booth.

"We were the lowest rated of the new shows," says Walberg matter-of-factly. "People still don't know who we are." This gives Walberg a chance to change his image. "What we were doing last fall was not the show I initially agreed to do. We started doing a new show January 1." The "new Mark Walberg" has moved beyond confrontation to things like visiting hospital emergency rooms.

With the other newbies consigned to reruns until death, Walberg can hope to pick up some of their leftover ratings before fall. But that assumes stations haven't already lined up replacements. A station manager from one of the nation's biggest cities has told me Walberg's dead; the ranch may be most useful as an insurance policy for the host's future career. "Look," says Walberg, "I've been on 40 shows in eight years. I've got a reputation to protect that goes beyond any particular show. I've got to be proud to attach my name to it."

The same station manager tells me that *Tampestt Bledsoe* still has a chance, assuming she impresses the right people. It is that why she has four layers of flacks protecting her? At the Columbia TriStar booth, publicists with earpieces stand guard at both entrances. Secret Service-style. Two of them request the right to sit in on a Bledsoe interview, "in case you get into certain areas we don't want to discuss."

Flanked by her Secret Service agents, Bledsoe sits saramaly in white pantsuit, big hair, and much makeup. Why does she think that she and Walberg are the only ones left standing? "I've been successful considering the number of shows and the various other factors that influence programming that are out there, and I hope I continue that success. Mark has been successful in his own way." Few definitions of TV success embrace Walberg's one rating, or Bledsoe's two.

Again, why are you here while Carrie Wilson's at home? "On a rather

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simple level it has to do with the fact that people watched me grow up. They feel they know me. People tuned in expecting a certain thing, and they've got that." What she's not mentioning is one of those "other factors that influence programming"—both *Ricki* and *Tempestt* are Columbia products, and stations that want one show are strongly encouraged to take the other.

At the Multimedia booth, where they're talking entertainment, there's a less frenetic, less fabulous vibe. The decor is auto-showroom Shinto, white columns pergolaed above carpeted risers, ringed by little booths where sales reps arm-wrestle with stations and strike deals. The risers are festooned with couches. A man with a gray ponytail, thinning hair, and a thousand-dollar suit trips backward over a couch and falls on his butt, laughing. He doesn't drop his cell phone. He's not wearing socks.

Jerry Springer is here, dressed all in black. Two major-market stations have just dropped his show, but a station across town just as quickly picked it up. Bill Bennett cannot declare

his fists into the tabletop, "and she has bulimia, then it's 20/20 with Barbara Walters and it's news." The same topic on a talk show, he says, is somehow no longer news, because the people on talk shows don't matter to Bill Bennett. "They don't think these people deserve to be heard or seen. Mine is a working-class audience. It's very representative of America."

Up until the middle of this century, the public square was a physical space in the center of the city. The automobile emptied the public square, and now in our mailed and sprawling cities there is no central gathering place. Those folks with enough cash physically separate themselves from the less fortunate, moving into gated communities, driving in locked cars from one suburban shopping fortress to the next.

The advent of cable allowed the TV industry to replicate this social triage, and now TV is structured much like America's civic spaces. When there was just a trio of networks, most Americans got their information from the three nightly newscasts, and seemed to inhabit the

Presented with racists, cheaters, faithless friends, and egomaniacs, the talk audience is asked to identify right and wrong and mete out rewards accordingly.

victory, says Springer. "There hasn't been one successful show that has gone off the air. They can take credit for nothing. None. Zero." He has no plans to alter anything on his show. "If it's not outrageous, it doesn't get on the air," he says. "I will never change that."

Springer is quite clear when the pressure will cease: "November." If the context for all these attacks is electoral politics, what's the subtext? Why the obsession with something as ephemeral as talk? Walberg thinks the underlying message is racial: "When Bill Bennett talks about 'the dark side of life,' he means that in more than one way."

Springer thinks it's also about class. "The way they call these people trash.... Do you ever call a Congressman trash? It's a euphemism for trailer park, minorities, space between their teeth. We all know it. They don't want to hear about them, they don't want to see them."

Richard Bey's involved in a mini-class war of his own at NATPE. Around the corner, the Columbia TriStar booth bustles with people drawn by Spago food and star power—Ricki, The Nanny, the dog from *Mad About You*. At Bey's humbler abode, All American, we've got elbow room to spare, and we're served drinks by women in harem costumes, a nod to the company's *Sinbad*. Bey's show is often cited as the most egregious of the talk pack, because he usually mixes outrageous stunts like judges and juries, the wheel and the rack into his shtick.

"When it's Princess Di," says Bey, pressing

same country. Now the wealthy watch cable networks like A&E, CNN, and the Discovery Channel, and with cable penetration creeping toward 70 percent, "free" television is increasingly left to the have-nots, the mob. The elite's tendency to extract information and a sense of a shared world from better-appointed corners of the multiverse has only been accelerated by the growth of the Internet. The putative democracy of cyberspace has steep entrance fees—literacy, access to a computer, monthly fees.

The mob's public square is the talk show. Anyone with a \$100 black-and-white set can watch. Most are syndicated, i.e., sold to local stations à la carte, and air during the daytime. The talk audience therefore skews toward folks who're home during the day and don't have cable or Internet accounts—the un- and underemployed, women, minorities, the young, the infirm.

To hold the attention of this army of security guards and single moms, talk shows keep the subject matter simple, and insist on confrontation. The conflict featured on talk shows is that between good and evil. Presented with racists, cheaters, faithless friends, and egomaniacs, the audience is asked to identify right and wrong and mete out rewards accordingly. As Springer once said, "My audience is always on the right side."

But the right side is never hard to find, because the issues are always simple. If the evil were any harder to decipher, were some issue of world importance, like ozone or Bosnia,

the talk show village wouldn't know who to put on the rack. While the elite live in the global village, the true villagers are lost in a weird, wired, fractured globe they didn't make.

Because talk shows are taped in urban centers, the studio audiences draw on each program's inner-city constituency. The guests, meanwhile, are plucked from a much wider pool—all those spaces between New York and L.A. clogged with unsuccessful white people. The result is the Projects vs. the Trailer Court. The acid-washed and the unwashed torment each other while the urban underclass heckles.

At "Ricki, Help Me Raise My Baby," the pre-show warm-up included lots of audience participation. A staffer named Stuart asked for volunteers from the crowd to practice Q&As. He needed a stand-in talk show host. He picked Shedonna, a young black woman who proved very comfortable wielding the mike and being the center of attention for two minutes. She read a few cue cards, "interviewed" a "guest" who claimed to have been impregnated by aliens with Dennis Rodman's triplets, then sat down to much applause.

During the taping, most of the on-camera guests were single moms. A guy at the end of my row stood up to direct a question at a mom who couldn't keep her kid quiet. "Is there a man in the house?" he asked. She said no. When he sat down, he whispered to his girlfriend, "That child needs a male figure. He doesn't have a male figure." "Yeah," she whispered back, "most people don't."

In those two brief incidents is a whole world, where single moms and phonetic "crazy names" are the norm, and where the lower echelon enjoys the spotlight for a fleeting instant. To someone like Bill Bennett, it's a world that should be invisible, especially since he helped create it.

Bennett was Secretary of Education during the Reagan-Bush era, when it finally became official that a good education should be available only to those who can afford it. Having failed to teach underclass youth to read, in his next job, as drug czar, Bennett jailed them for minor drug offenses, so that they could be thoroughly criminalized and never participate in a meaningful way in society.

All those techno-barricades—car, cable, modem—should permit "haves" like Bennett to channel-surf past the poor, to V-chip them altogether if needed. Yet talk shows celebrate the have-nots in full, dysfunctional glory, reminding Bennett of every social ill he ever made worse. As a freelance foe of talk shows, he's suppressing the proof of his negligence in the name of good taste.

You can't even see Manhattan from this part of New Jersey's Meadowlands. At one end of the parking lot there's a demi-mall called Outlets at the Cove, a seconds depot for Calvin Klein and Meidenform. It seems to draw all its meager sustenance from the boxy industrial nubbins at

[continued on page 118](#)

The advertisement features a dark, moody background. In the foreground, a white Fender electric guitar is positioned vertically on the left. To its right, a pair of dark denim jeans is displayed, showing the Fender logo on the back pocket. The word "Fender" is written in its signature script font, with "CLOTHES" in a bold, sans-serif font below it. The overall aesthetic is classic and rock-and-roll.

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believe it or NOT

There's more to Joan Osborne,
says **Alyssa Katz**, than
that icky song about God.

Photographs by Anette Aurell.

Television cameras swirl giddily on cranes and dollies and human shoulders, all clamoring to lend some sense of excitement to the remarkably dull performers rehearsing on stage. Dance-pop heartthrobs East 17 are making their big appearance on *Top of the Pops*, the BBC's legendary chart-countdown show. For the occasion they've dragged along a trio of Middle Eastern drummers, who are kicking it with a mystical desert rhythm while the airbrushed singer practices his pinup smile. But this pop spectacle is momentarily upstaged by an otherworldly voice wafting in from another stage on the set. A Siren's call from the spirit world, it wails and soars, going nowhere in particular to the beat of the traps. Heads turn.

After a few bars, Joan Osborne finishes practicing her qawwali, the sacred Sufi music she recently studied on a trip to India. She makes eye contact with her own band's drummer, and within moments she's working some dirty-dancing moves against his left thigh. Osborne's womanly composure can never quite hide her Ritalin-kid urge to shake booty; in airports, in dressing rooms, and no doubt in her most private moments, her hips frequently answer to some unseen snake charmer.

Top of the Pops host Julian Cope is feeling similar urges, shimmying his long limbs to the seductive pulse. When the drummers finally take five, everybody finds their marks, and the rehearsal proper begins. Cope intros East 17, and immediately after they wrap up their multiculti shtick, the cameras cut to Osborne.

Her song begins with that chiming riff, now as stubbornly ingrained in the collective subconscious as a jingle, or maybe a prayer.

"If God had a face / What would it look like?" Osborne sings in a voice

noticeably more conventional than the one she flashed moments ago. She pumps her knee to try to work up some stage energy, while her band gamely fakes along to a prerecorded track. "What if God was one of us / Just a slob like one of us..."

By the end of the day, Joan Osborne will have sung "One of Us" four times in the Top of the Pops studio. She'll have mumbled along twice to a tape in the van on the way to the BBC's studio north of London (once in a cutting Britpunk accent). And waiting backstage before the final taping, she'll wearily improvise a new chorus for a song she didn't write but whose cross she'll bar for a long time yet: "I'm so sick / Of this damn song." Osborne's bassist, Rainy Ortega, calculated how many times they've performed "One of Us" in the past year: Counting the European tour they've been on, headlining in some cities and opening for Melissa Etheridge in others, they're up to about 1,060.

Yet as "One of Us" itself sort of observes, one might have to believe in Jesus and the saints and all the profits. In less than a year, the 33-year-old Osborne has gone from queen of the New York blues-bar circuit to a platinum-selling, Grammy-nominated member of the VH1 pantheon, and if the price she has to pay for that very mainstream success is to remain cagey about her theological message, that's okay with her. When a reporter from the London *Daily Telegraph* wondered if she was being sardonic when she sang that "God is great," Osborne replied, "Most of the time I'm not. But it does depend on the day."

When I ask Osborne about it later on she just laughs. "The song has that elasticity," she says. "You can sing seven or eight different interpretations—it's like a good blues song." She mildly explains that "the spiritual content of the song is not something I'm upset about," and it's easy to see things from her perspective. The notion of God being the smelly guy sitting next to you is an appealing and radically democratic vision of transcendence, the kind of real-world spirituality that Walt Whitman based his life's work on.

If Osborne isn't going to tell us what to make of it all, there are others who gladly will. Rush Limbaugh plugged "One of Us" on his TV show, insisting, as she disdainfully describes it, "that the popularity of that song was a sign that the youth of America was returning to fundamentalist religious values. He asked permission to put the video on, and I said 'HELL NO!'" she recalls in a loud, bluesy roar. Her album, *Relish*, showcases that Grand Canyon of a voice, steeped in both the pains and the pleasures of American roots music. "The great music I was always into was very singer-oriented and expressive," she says—the O'Jays and Gladys Knight on the black radio station, the Stones and whatever else her friends had lying around their rec room. "And singing is a fucking blast. When it's really good it's as

good as the best sex. I get nipple erections all the time on stage, I do!"

Yes, another woman who talks and sings openly about sex; you thought there was a quota or something? *Relish* is crammed with more sinners than Bruce Springsteen could shake a bandanna at. "St. Teresa" earns her money one trick at a time; in "Right Hand Man," Osborne testifies to what it's like to walk around in public right after getting laid. The record ends with "Lumina," a celebration of Eve and the forbidden fruit. God only knows if the values-obsessed public that can't get enough of "One of Us" will embrace her scorching tales of fallen young women, or a voice often raw as a demon's. But now that she has their attention, Osborne has no plans to let go. "I don't want to make it sound like a fate worse than death, but it is a challenge to somehow take this sudden notoriety and shape it into an accurate reflection of what I'm trying to do," she muses. "And that's—I don't know—good music."

Osborne hates-hates-hates it when magazines call her Saint Joan, but that's pretty much what she looks like when I first come upon her in a Cologne, Germany, hotel lobby. Her streaked golden tresses are capped with a floppy-eared gray knit cap that resembles chain mail for a stuffed animal, and her catlike green eyes could easily hold divine wisdom. Her nose pierce is looking a little irritated; she got it done a few months ago, and the trip to India hasn't helped the healing process. (The ring in the "One of Us" video is a clip-on; after trying it out for the shoot she liked the look so much she decided to do it for real.)

I wouldn't be the first to ask Osborne who exactly "us" is, but when we find some time to talk amid the pre-concert hubbub, I find that she is very much one of me. Her black nail polish is chipped, and she's comfily wearing a hat hooded sweatshirt. Like any two proper New Yorkers, we talk about real estate—at different times we've lived in the same Brooklyn neighborhoods, and she plans to keep her affordable apartment, which is within earshot of an elevated train.

All blues performers need to craft a legend about themselves, and Osborne's, while cheesy, is apparently true. Born in a small town near Louisville, Kentucky, raised Catholic by a building contractor and a seamstress, she first arrived in the early '80s to attend NYU film school. She dropped out a couple of years later when the money ran dry. "Most of the people there were spoiled rich boys who wanted to be the next George Lucas," she says. Osborne was working as a receptionist at a jingles recording studio when she and her late-night posse stumbled into a bar on open-mike night. Sometime around three A.M. a drunkenly susceptible Osborne was persuaded to get up on stage and sing something. She chose

Billie Holiday's "God Bless the Child"—Him again. "It hit me so strongly," she says now. "Coming from a medium that was so involved with machinery, this very long process from images in your head to finished product, suddenly I was thrown into this thing that was so immediate and physical."

Open mikes gave way to gigs at the

**"Singing is a blast," says Osborne.
"It's as good as the best sex. I get nipple
erections all the time on stage."**



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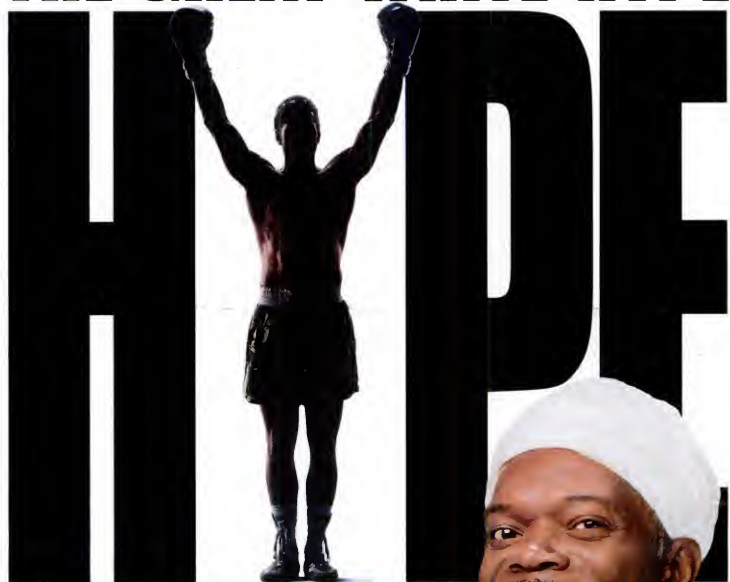
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"The one beef I have with the record is you can't even really tell what a good singer I am," says Osbourne. "I think I have a lot more in me than what's on there."

Nightingale's bar, the hub of a late-'80s blues-rock scene that fostered Blues Traveler, God Street Wine, and scads of bands that never made it to H.O.R.D.E. "You'd end up going to see someone's gig," Osbourne tells me in her faintly down-home, rough-edged voice, "and they would get done at 2:30 in the morning, so you'd hang out at the bar for another hour or so. Then we'd all get kicked out and go over to somebody's house, and sit up and jam until five or six in the morning."

A whole lot of New Yorkers saw Osbourne play over the years, particularly once she became a regular at the neo-hippie haunt Wetlands. She set up a hot line—1-800-292-JOAN—for info on her incredibly frequent gigs, and independently released a live album, *Soul Show*. Then a former Columbia Records executive and sometime producer named Rick Chertoff caught onto the buzz, and Joan Osbourne's train switched to the express track. Chertoff had a new label, Blue Gorilla, and was looking to repeat the success he'd had producing debut albums by two other New York-based powerhouse women, Cyndi Lauper and Sophie B. Hawkins. He persuaded Osbourne to hook up with a couple of his pals from the Hooters, a band that had scored a few cheesy hits, played Live Aid, and then vanished from sight. "I was a little bit wary of the Hooters collaboration," Osbourne recalls. "I was like, wasn't that one of those '80s bands that wore a lot of eye makeup?"

It was Hooters guitarist (and not particularly religious Jew) Eric Bazilian who went home one night and wrote "One of Us" to show his girlfriend how a four-track recorder worked. On the rest of *Relish*, Bazilian and Co. collaborated closely with Osbourne, holding what Chertoff rather clinically calls "writing labs." "We really needed to make the songs worthy adversaries to her performance," says Chertoff. "And that took some time. I guess you could say we labored over that." Obvious efforts were made to stick up and tone down Osbourne's raging singing style. On "One of Us," for example, Chertoff had her do repeated takes until she perfected that crystalline little-girly voice.

Osbourne cautiously says that her next album will be "more raw and a little less carefully arranged and scientifically put together"—in other words, a lot like what she was doing before. "The one beef I have with the record is you can't even really tell what a good singer I am—I think I have a lot more in me than what's on there." After *Relish* was finished, Osbourne bid

farewell to Chertoff's hit-making squad, brought back her longtime guitarist, Jack Petruzzelli, and rounded out the new band with cheerfully attitudinous indie rockers. Like some dubbed kung-fu movie, the new lineup appears in the videos for the "St. Teresa" and "Right Hand Man," miming along to a slick sound they wouldn't be caught dead playing themselves. At the show in Cologne, Rainy Orteca, an alt-rocker from Philadelphia, attacks her bass with legs braced wide and stringy hair flying; had Melissa auf der Maur not won Courtney Love's heart, Orteca was reportedly next in line to join Hole. On guitar, Erik Della Penna resembles nothing so much as a swarthy Billie Joe. Drummer Chalo Quintana survived the late-'70s L.A. punk scene, and plays like it.

As for Osbourne, she struts onto the stage and grabs the mike stand tightly; she's still getting used to playing anonymous arenas. As she relaxes, her arms start to swing, her pelvis to gyrate; it wasn't for nothing that she named her record label Womanly Hips Music. She tries to rev up the crowd with hoots and howls, the kind of good-time noises found all over *Soul Show*, but they remain eerily placid. Then the strains of "One of Us" begin, and thousands of Melissa Etheridge fans simultaneously raise their hands high above their heads and clap in sync to the music.

What they get back from Osbourne is some biting revisionism. She

doesn't sound as sure about what to believe in anymore. "Yeeeahh, yeeeahh," she rasps, "God is greet...." The mike stand is now thrust away between her legs, and whether she realizes it or not, she's coming close to committing a most excellently lewd, even blasphemous, act.

"Let's have some music in here!"

We're in a London taxi on our way to dinner, and the cabbie doesn't quite seem to realize that Joan Osbourne is

talking to him. Sitting in the front passenger seat, the band's road manager is on autopilot after months of touring; well aware of Osbourne's insatiable need to hear music, he reflexively leans over and switches on the radio. The driver immediately turns it off. "Why don't you ask first!" he snaps, scaring us all. "Do I go into your house and turn on the radio without asking?" Osbourne politely rephrases her request. "Can we turn the music on, please?" The driver pretends not to hear, and we all sit in awkward silence for several minutes. Then he suddenly, petulantly turns the radio back on. Strains of cool jazz entomb the car.

After dinner, we get back to the hotel to find a fax waiting. It's from a London associate of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, the world's most acclaimed qawwali singer. In Pakistan, he's regarded as a being of godlike powers; at his live performances, men dance in ecstatic trances and throw money at the stage. Khan would like to make Joan Osbourne one of his musical disciples. "This involves a ritual of some kind," the fax says mysteriously; can they have lunch to discuss this? "This is so fucking amazing!" Osbourne raves. "Forget the record and the touring and the Grammys—this is the real deal."

"That's sooo cool," I find myself repeating, mantra-like. But even while I share in her jubilation, I can see uncertainty flicker in her eyes. Long years of big ambition and bigger promises have clearly rendered her cautious. After she's had a chance to sleep on it, I check in with her about the big news. "Obviously I'm thrilled," she says, "but there's something about it that seems too good to be true. Why would he pick me to pass these literally sacred teachings to, that he learned from his father and his father learned from his father before? Why me, this American popular music singer?" And a woman. "And a woman. Exactly."

Being a female qawwali fan isn't easy. "I would go to these mosques in India," recounts Osbourne, "and sit there in my sari, just sort of respectfully listening, and there'd be 50 men standing around in a circle looking at me." One of the rare women in rock who will actually utter the word "feminist," Osbourne occasionally performs in a T-shirt bearing the George Michael-esque slogan CHOICE. And she is in fact a veteran of the front lines in the abortion wars. Until her touring schedule made it unworkable,

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Threat

Brandishing their pimp tunes for the apocalypse, **Girls Against Boys**, says **Chris Norris**, are rock'n'roll's newest heavyweight contenders. Photographs by Michael Williams.

Girls Against Boys have a style, a classic, time-honored mode of sonic expression that one might call—in strictly technical terms—bad-motherfucker music. Ominous, sultry, noisy, depraved, this is the sound you want pumping in your ride as you roll past vacant porn shops and blighted mini-golf courses. It's like the martini photo on the cover of their last record, *Cruise Yourself*: a bleary-eyed view from above the glass, staring down into a glimmering depth of gin and sick kicks. And, as the new *House of GVSGB* loudly proves, *Girls Against Boys* have recently gotten even better at sounding bad.

"We're not hard-asses or anything," says singer/guitarist Scott McCloud, 28, hunky with a slightly maniacal twitchiness—and a laugh so explosive you start eying exit routes. He, bassist Johnny Temple, and drummer Alexis Flegsig sit in a bar in their home base, New York's East Village. "Still, I would say I'm into examining feelings that are not wholesome at all." An aura of sleazy magnetism definitely follows GvSB around. "That all started when people began saying they thought our music was sexy," McCloud says, lighting a Marlboro as the jukebox issues deep, Delta-blues moans behind him. "But then people started saying we're sexy guys, which was never the intention. Like, 'Hey, we're sexy guys, listen to our music.'"

The Fabio of all-rock?

"Yeah," agrees Temple. "Not that Fabio's not an influence."

Other influences are more apparent, if deftly woven into an imposing whole. Their fierce racket may recall post-industrial heavyweights like Big Black and Cop Shoot Cop, but the GvSB rhythm team—Flegsig, Temple, and keyboardist/second bassist Eli Janney—rein it all into a finely tuned noise-shimmy. Janney's fassetto coos and eerie found-sounds add a veneer of lounge suavité to the riffed brutality. And, instead of, say, the scrotal contortions of Jesus Lizard singer David Yow, McCloud's display of male energy is much smoother, blacker even. He prefers to lean back and leer. Even through gobs of static and imagery, his insinuating drawl sounds like the most profane sort of suggestion—like a strip-show barker at a car-cascade scene.

The odd, refracted R&B essence in the GvSB groove may owe something to the band's origins in Washington, D.C., where go-go, one of the most coltish rock beats ever invented, made a lasting impression. "We'd go to Trouble Funk and Rare Essence shows that were so intense," Temple recalls. "The all-ages ones were always getting stopped for violence. And the 21-and-over shows didn't have the dangerous adolescent vibe, but still

had this crazy-ass, mature sexual energy. And this beat that just was not going to stop." Beats, soul, and white-boy noise. Add an aura of sexual menace and you've got textbook rock'n'roll.

"I'm definitely into that line between obsessive and sane," McCloud says, mid-Rolling Rock. "I like taking normal, romantic, love-song lyrics and putting the worst sort of overtones to it."

Sexual menace is not the expected signature of a band that came up in D.C.'s righteously ethical hardcore scene under the Fugazi administration. It was there that Temple, McCloud, and Flegsig, buds at Northwest D.C.'s Woodrow Wilson High School, played together in Soulside, before being lulled by the death-disco of Chicago's Wax Trax! (and producer friend Janney) into trying some arty, noise-jazz studio experiments. Two albums worth were released on Adult Swim, the boutique label of Dischord's Jeff Nelson. Then, the band released the lubricious *Venus Luxure* No. 1 *Baby* on the bastion of Budweiser-and-crank aggression, Chicago's Touch and Go. That 1993 record, plus a tour with the Jesus Lizard, began lighting the passions of post-grunge sophisticates.

One selling point is the telegraphically lurid verses of McCloud, a confessed Henry Miller junkie. But the real key to the *Girls Against Boys* ethos may be New York, their adopted city since 1989. "Kiss cool / Cool kiss / I love it when they turn the bliss on," McCloud sings in "Click Click," evoking the dark, tawdry, mechanized pleasure-factory that is NYC. "We first lived in Bay Ridge, way out by Coney Island," he remembers.

"A horrible subway ride and a 60-block walk under the F-train tracks—total desecration. I got a lot of lyrics just from walking around at night."

Whatever its source, this sexy, dystopian, truck-stop funk has begun to look a lot like industry gold. "Every show has been like 100 A&R guys and the fans," says Karen Glauber, vice president and "post modern" editor of the trade magazine *Hits*. "Girls Against Boys are melding indie and the art scene with normal, straightforward rock. I really think they could be as genre-defining as R.E.M., Hüsker Dü, or Soundgarden were for their time."

Sentiments like these led to GvSB signing to Geffen—and revealing their most obvious Fugazi influence. Rather than dashing off a contract-appealing fluff job, they honored their handshake deal with Touch and Go by making their best album to date. "There are still a lot of mixed feelings about leaving," says McCloud, who will still record for the label with his longer side-project, New Wet Kojak. "It's like a family. Of course we're going to try to make a great record."

Indeed, this band has an almost distressing level of love and stability. Temple has a master's degree in social work and, like every member of the band, lives with a girlfriend. Janney's other half, Kerri Kenney, plays in the trio Cake Like. Though her more frequent MTV appearances are in the cast of *The State*, McCloud lives with Sophie Toulouse, who's French and whom he met when her band supported his in Europe. They've been together for two years. They share a modest East Village apartment. They have a cocker spaniel, for chrissakes.

Not to worry, though—*Girls Against Boys* remain committed ne'er-dowells. "Our first record for Geffen is going to be a complete cover of Hootie & the Blowfish songs," promises McCloud. "We're going to make 'Hold My Hand' the sickest, most evil song you've ever heard." ●



Color me bad:
clockwise
from top left,
Johnny Temple,
Eli Janney,
Alexis Fleisig, and
Scott McCloud.



BIG STAR[®]

the two stooges

David Yow of the Jesus Lizard learns how Iggy Pop maintains his lust for life.

David Yow: Interviewing you is pretty weird, because the press has made comparisons between us.

Iggy Pop: Yeah, well, all my friends say, "I went out and saw this guy the other night and he's just like you, man."

I figure it's mostly because we're both short and ugly and take our shirts off, except you're not ugly.

And I saw you dive in the crowd about 113 times in, like, two minutes when I saw you. So there's that superficial comparison.

Our guitarist, Duane, is from around your old stomping grounds. He used to live in Ypsilanti.

No shit, Ypsilanti? I've still never figured out what this guy Ypsilanti did. He's some obscure Greek hero. It's a really strange name for a town in Michigan. The most famous thing in Ypsilanti is this water tower made out of brick, about 175 years old. It looks like this big penis.

Do you have relatives there?

No. Not anymore. No interest. The only relatives I have are the Stooges.

Do you talk to those guys?

Kind of. Scott Asheton is my friend and he's always wanted to do something, but I don't really have the time or interest to do our old tunes. I see Ron Asheton maybe once a year. He still lives where he lived when I got the band together, lives with his mother, same house, same phone number as 30 years ago.

Which of your records stick out in your mind?

Well, whenever I hear *Fun House* I'm pretty amazed. Or there are particular cuts. I like "Down on the Street," "Shake Appeal," "I Got a Right," which isn't on any album. And then there's this really strange one called "Gimme Some Skin." When I hear that I just go crazy with glee. But most people wouldn't get it. That makes me feel really alienated.

I'm working on acoustic music now for a [Johnny Depp] film that's yet to be shot. And I really want to sing songs that would be about having your heart broken and wanting to do it again. Sinatra kind of shit.

What do you do on your downtime?

Well, this week my big project is buying shit at auctions. Some antiques and some high-class junk, ranging from rugs to furniture to lithographs, and also African and oceanic tribal art. A week prior to the auction, you go look at the exhibit. It's like having your own little museum. I never go to the auction, I always do it by phone, 'cause it's more fun to not actually sit

goes out in the street he wants to smell women and eat garbage.

I understand you're hoping for another kid. If fortune smiled on me, and the person was right, I could visualize having a little girl to kind of look up at me and go, "Oh daddy!" Though it might come out a boy and I'd be like, oh bumper, another fucking dick in the family.
How old is your son?

He's 26.

Holy shit.

He's living in Arizona. He's working his way through community college there. It wasn't easy for him being related to me either because of what I do and also because of me personally. I'm real proud of him.

Were you a Beatles fan when you were growing up?

To a point. I enjoyed their early records; they lost me with *Sgt. Pepper's*, which I think is a really overrated and depressing album. Once they got into the droopy mustaches, the whole thing kind of lost it for me.

A good friend of mine blames Sgt. Pepper's for the way rock turned out. This over-the-top artiness.

Basically, there was a movement, by the sons and daughters of the middle class in America and England, to take this greasy little lower-class phenomenon and claim it for themselves. We'll promote it, we'll lifestyle it. And in a lot of ways that's been convenient for me. I've made a better living at it. But it did take away a lot of the guts and flesh.

Are you excited about your new album, *Naughty Little Doggie*?

I played the songs from it with some of my other songs, and it felt really good playing them. As far as the rest of it, will anybody like it—I just have to wait and see. All in all I feel pretty good. I mean I'm glad I didn't call it, like, *The Meaningful Aroma of My Important Farts*. My 30 years of show business, blah, blah, blah.

Do you think you'll be doing this until the day you die?

Yeah.
Way to go. *



Gnaw power: Iggy Pop.

there. I like being the guy on the phone.

You've got a cat and a dog, right?

I got a cat who's sitting right here. She's Mexican Siamese and she didn't get very good food when she was little so she's bowlegged. The animals in Mexico run a little smaller because they don't have the same concept of pet down there. My dog was a street dog when I found him. I pupped him between Mexico and New York, but now he stays there because he goes crazy in New York. He's not trained, so when he

Harmony in My Head

Radiohead's *The Bends* reveals a band whose musical flights go far beyond "Creep"—and, as J.D. Considine discovers, rely on none of the usual Britpop poses. Photographs by Rankin.

Oxford University may be celebrated for its grassy quads, ancient architecture, and lush, well-ordered gardens, but what a visitor experiences is mostly walls, some of them elegant and artful, some menacingly medieval. Gates are few and far between, and are inevitably graced with a sign announcing that thus-and-such college is closed to visitors.

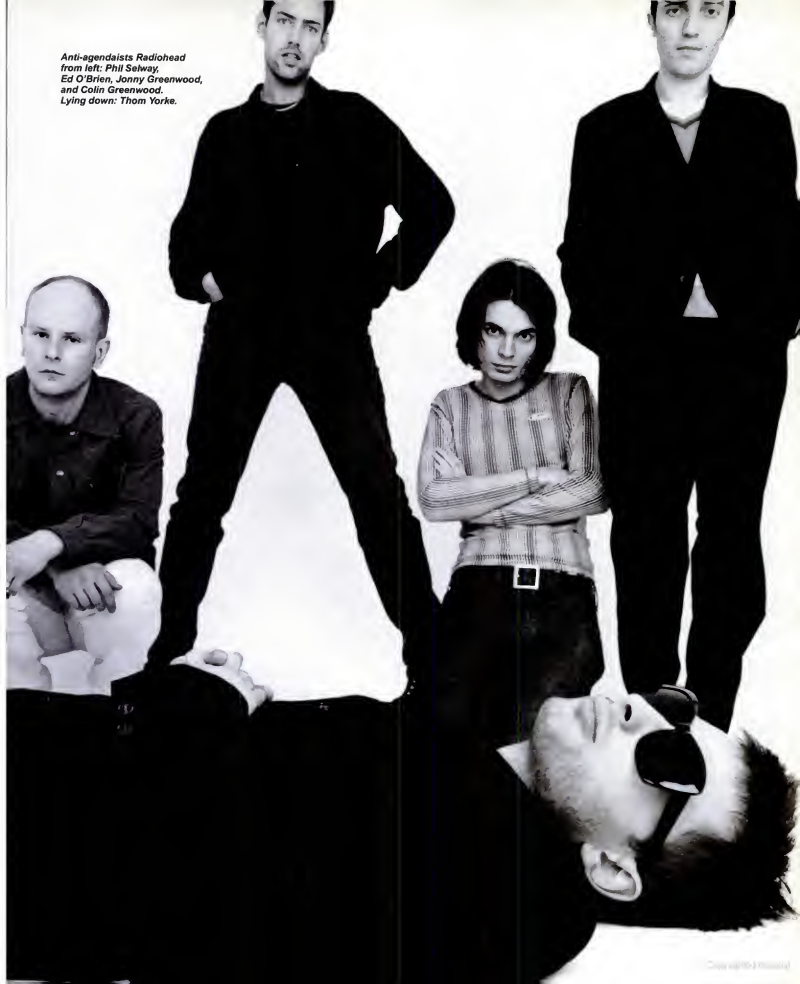
"Have you read *Jude the Obscure*?" asks Radiohead singer Thom Yorke. He's drinking coffee in the very proper lounge of Oxford's very proper Forte Grande Randolph Hotel, looking for all the world like Martin Short doing Johnny Rotten. "The whole book is about Jude trying to get into the University, and then not being able to do it. And in the end driving himself crazy."

"You know, for one very pretentious moment, we nearly called the band 'Jude,' among many other hundreds of names," says Jonny Greenwood, who with his gangly limbs, rucksack, and anorak, looks like a student rather than the band's lead guitarist and keyboard whiz.

"The other one was 'Music,'" adds Yorke with a cackle. "Phew, eh?"

Phew, indeed. Yet as wincingly precious as those names are, they do speak to two important points: First, that the members of Radiohead, like Jude, are perennial outsiders, never quite

*Anti-agendaists Radiohead
from left: Phil Selway,
Ed O'Brien, Jonny Greenwood,
and Colin Greenwood.
Lying down: Thom Yorke.*





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gaining entry to the hallowed halls of Britpop; and second, that Music really is the most important thing the band has to offer. Because as every other band in Britain was out last year flogging its image, agenda, look or theory, Radiohead merely delivered an album of exceptional power and beauty called *The Bends*.

Packed with soaring melodies and dramatic bursts of instrumental color, it fit no particular trend, instead wrapping each song in just the right combination of guitar crunch, keyboard hush, and rhythm-section push. Not the most obvious way to make music, but give it time and you're soon smitten. Just ask the British music press, which ranked *The Bends* right up with the far more fashionable work of Blur, Elastica, and Oasis.

Not bad for a band that refuses to trade Oxford for London. Initially part of the Thames Valley Movement—a loose confederation of Oxford-area bands such as Ride, Slowdive, and Chapterhouse, whose specialty was a swirling, guitar-heavy sound and a total lack of stage presence—Radiohead made the leap from local to international in 1993 with the release of *Pablo Honey*, an album mainly known for giving the world "Creep."

A classic of the miserable-male genre, what put "Creep" over wasn't Yorke's well-phrased self-deprecation but the way Greenwood's hyperdistorted guitar bludgeoned the chorus into submission. No matter how many times you hear it, there's something about the car-trying-to-start hesitation of that power chord that leaves even well-adjusted listeners raving like Beavis and Butt-head. "Beavis nearly comes, doesn't he?" laughs Greenwood, recalling the "Creep" segment of *Beavis and Butt-head*.

"Creep" became so big, in fact, that it threatened to dwarf the band. Did they ever consider refusing to play the tune?

"Well, we had this chat with Michael Stipe," says bassist Colin Greenwood. Radiohead was opening for R.E.M., and R.E.M. had gone through a similar problem with "Losing My Religion." "Stipe always gives this little speech before they start to do the song, saying 'This isn't our song anymore. This is your song.' The fact that we were still doing 'Creep,' he thought, was really cool."

That's not to say the band wasn't tempted to ditch their "Creep." "The beach party," snorts Yorke. "We swore that would be the last time we'd do that fucking thing. An MTV Beach Party. Standing by a pool, because the sun didn't come out."

"At least we played well," offers Jonny Greenwood. "But I don't think the irony was lost on people. All these gorgeous, bikini-ed girls shaking their mammary glands, and we're playing 'Creep' and looking terrible."

"In the rain," adds Yorke.

It didn't help that the members of Radiohead hardly come across as party animals. As a group, they seem happy to converse quietly or sit nose-in-book while the world goes on around them. This has made rock stardom a shock. "A couple girls turned up yesterday, asking if this was the street where the guy from Radiohead lived," recounts Colin Greenwood with an ironic

chuckle. "Having a stalker is such a '90s thing."

The success of *The Bends* has kept Radiohead from being known only as the Creep Band. Getting there wasn't easy. When Radiohead began work on their second album, in February 1994, the British music press was once again arguing that what England needed most was bands with an easily pigeonholed attitude. So as Oasis, Blur, and others rose to the challenge, Yorke began to worry. "I was completely paranoid," he says. "Blur decided to be mods, so we had to decide to be something else. But I couldn't work out what it was. All of the things we like and were thinking of modeling ourselves on are fairly image-free."

"I remember when we first signed, someone said, 'What agenda do you have?' " says guitarist Ed O'Brien. "With British bands, there was this whole thing about having something to say. But—maybe naively—we said, 'it's about music.' And that's what it's about."

Radiohead's sound set *The Bends* apart from everything else the British rock scene produced last year. Lush with aural detail and arresting arrangements, the album never settles into a specific genre, making it easy to get lost in the depth and drama of the songs. And while other Britpoppers lyrically opt for the cutting or clever, what Yorke goes for is resonance. It can be as simple as the artificiality implicit in the title "Fake Plastic Trees," or as deeply layered as the way "My Iron Lung" becomes a metaphor for a relationship as confining as it is sustaining.

But musical and verbal atmospherics often don't translate easily to MTV. Unlike "Creep," *The Bends* took a long while to climb the charts. "It's taken people a year to figure [the album] out, and now they're going 'Fucking 'ell,'" gloats Yorke. Ironically, the idea for the *Pulp Fiction*-ish Buzz Clip breakout hit "High and Dry," came entirely from director Paul Cunningham. "I like the idea of it being someone else's song completely," says the singer. Otherwise, Radiohead's experience with video has been less than positive. "There was that American video woman," recalls Jonny Greenwood, as Yorke rolls his eyes. "She came over with us on a video shoot and said, 'Can you make the little chap jump up and down a bit?'"

"That kind of says it all." ■





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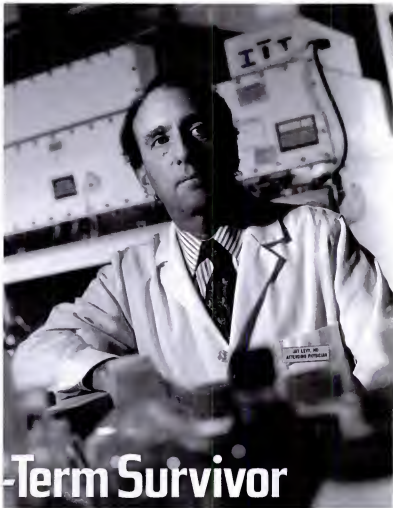
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Long-Term Survivor

AIDS pioneer Dr. Jay Levy reflects on 15 years on the front lines. Interview by Linda Marsa.

Dr. Jay Levy, a pioneering virologist at the University of California at San Francisco—a city in which half of the middle-aged homosexual men have died or are dying of AIDS—has been studying the phenomenon of long-term survival for more than ten years. From the beginning of the epidemic, Levy has consistently made scientific breakthroughs that were initially ignored, only to be later embraced by the AIDS mainstream. He was one of the first to isolate HIV, though the glory went to Robert Gallo and Luc Montagnier, who published their results first. Since 1986, back when HIV infection was thought to be invariably—and quickly—fatal, Levy has been looking at the exceptions: those who make it. He's always maintained that studying the survivors might bring out, at long last, effective treatments for AIDS. Levy, who believes HIV is the cause of AIDS, pioneered the observation that key immune-system cells called CD8 cells secrete a

substance that controls HIV, and is now hopeful that this substance could be harnessed. Sound familiar? Robert Gallo recently announced the discovery of certain substances that the immune system uses to protect itself. If Levy's name has been overshadowed by Gallo's in the media, it is only because he is far more cautious about publicizing his results.

In his cramped laboratory at the University of California at San Francisco, Levy relaxed in his cubbyhole of an office, which is graced with a trio of vivid landscapes of Greece and Bali that he painted himself, and talked about his 15 years in AIDS research.

SPIN: At the very beginning of the AIDS epidemic, people said this illness was always fatal. What made you go against conventional wisdom and study long-term survivors?

Levy: Here in San Francisco, the epicenter of the AIDS crisis, we can see the same HIV-positive people over and over again. And we saw there really was a group of people who were completely healthy and yet still had the virus in their blood. That gave us the hope of finding their secret and applying it to all infected people. We started to make observations on how the virus

and the immune system together form the components that determine whether you get the disease or not. And that's been the central theme of our research since 1984 or 1985. Back then, we thought that if they had been infected for a year and hadn't developed AIDS, they were "long-term survivors" already. Then as the years went by, we defined it as "more than six years," then "more than eight years," "ten years," and now we say "more than 12 years," although we have several that have survived more than 15 years and a couple that have been AIDS-free at least 18 years.

Is it possible that these people are just healthier than those who develop AIDS?

We have to define what "healthy" means. Health is a physiologic state; it depends on the workings of the cells, it depends on

the immune system, it depends on the mind. Chance is not there. Chance depends on a lot of elements: perhaps how much virus you got, the type of virus you got, the way the virus is introduced at the time of infection. Perhaps it depends on your immune response, which is genetically determined.

People say, well, health may be a state of mind; that long-term survivors are much more positive and they lead a healthier life and they have much less stress than the people who progress. That's a very good and logical possibility, and it has been studied in Denmark and studied here. But it has not been shown to be the reason. Survivors can be under just as much stress as everyone else. They can smoke and drink, although we try to discourage it. They may not get a lot of sleep over certain periods of time, and they do not seem to do meditation. So we need to explore whether there's a common theme, and keep our minds open to all these possibilities. What works for one person might not work for another, but we need to explore all of this.

Out of all the lifestyle and biological possibilities, how did you narrow your search down to CD8 cells?

In 1984, we had a patient from whose blood we could easily get [HIV] virus. Then about five

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months later we couldn't get any virus out of his blood. He was—and still is—healthy, so we wondered whether this was due to his ability to eliminate the virus, which was, for us, a really exciting possibility.

Now we know from virology that certain viruses are controlled by the immune system your whole life. Like herpes viruses, which are controlled by a lymphocyte [a white blood cell] called CD8. We thought this may be the same mechanism that keeps HIV in check. We looked at other patients, and after a series of experiments, conducted with my associate Chris Walker, we found that when you remove the CD8 cells from a sample, HIV appeared in the blood. But if you added back the CD8 cells to the same level, the virus disappeared. By 1985, we realized the CD8 cells were controlling the virus. By 1989, we showed the mechanism of how this worked—the cells

by Kurth] and with the same chemokines [factors produced by the immune cells] as Gallo. We haven't been able to confirm their findings. According to our research, those factors cannot be responsible for the immune protection. All I can say is that the factor we're looking for is not one of any of the known chemokines.

What originally convinced you that HIV was the cause of AIDS? We knew HIV was a new virus but we didn't know if people with AIDS were simply immunosuppressed or if this was the actual agent. So we had to prove that the virus could be transmitted by every route that had been reported as a high risk. And we had to be certain that this virus could survive the preparation of Factor VIII [a blood product given to hemophiliacs], as some hemophiliacs had also gotten AIDS. We per-

"Other researchers are now seeing what I've been trying to convince them of: that the most powerful weapon against this disease is naturally made."

secreted a substance that halted the replication of HIV—and that people varied in their production of this factor. Finally, Carl Mackiewicz, in my lab, demonstrated that the factor really is "turning off" HIV after the virus integrates into the cell. But then we had to figure out what the factor was. You see, the difficulty about this factor is that it's not secreted in large amounts.

So it's tough to isolate.

Yes, and we didn't have the resources to do after IL-1. I wrote to the National Institutes of Health for grant money and they thought it was risky. Another research team confirmed our findings in monkeys. But the NIH still wasn't convinced. Then no other groups confirmed our work for the longest time.

What's the status of your search for this factor?

Because we haven't had the resources to do a lot, we kind of nibbled away at what it could be. I've been going around trying to line up a biotech company to help us—which, frankly, I'm not very good at. What about the CD8 factors that were recently identified by Robert Gallo's group and Reinhard Kurth in Germany?

We've worked with IL-16 [a CD8 cell factor that was identified

formed those studies in November of 1983. Once we knew this virus could survive the purification process—it's a very long and involved process that I thought would destroy this virus—then we realized that it most likely was the cause of AIDS.

You've always been opposed to the use of AZT. Why?

I've never been in favor of using any retroviral drugs unless the individual already has AIDS symptoms. I think the drugs are toxic. We were very concerned about advocating AZT use in people when their CD4 cell counts fell below 500 because it's a toxic drug. You also get resistance to the drug quickly, and it can interfere with the body's natural ability to fight back.

How do you feel now that everyone's finally confirming your work?

I'm gratified that other researchers are now seeing what I've been trying to convince them of: that the most powerful weapon against HIV is naturally made. What better could you ask for? Now let's take aim on that factor—learn what it is, how to induce CD8 cells to make it, and how to make drugs that can really help people have long-term survival. ■

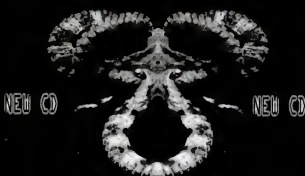
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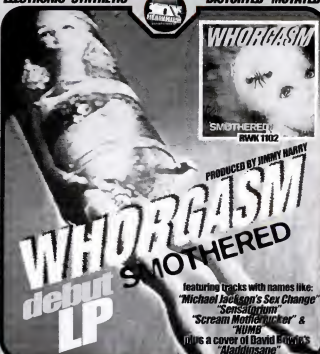
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OXYGEN

Feeling Minnesota

Kevin Garnett hoped to ditch his troubled past when he jumped straight from high school to the NBA. But the hard times are far from over for the Minnesota Timberwolves' new boy wonder. Introducing SPIN's new sports column.

Pro basketball's only non-matriculating bastard out of Carolina is naked to the world, save a skimpy white towel draped across his skinny legs and all. Seated on a folding chair in the Minnesota Timberwolves' carpeted, broom closet-sized locker room, Kevin Garnett is canopied by reporters; some gripping microphones, others cradling notebooks. The lowly T-Wolves, never even a threat to make the playoffs during their seven-year existence, just managed a 108-97 home win over the desultory New Jersey Nets. As one beat writer put it bluntly, "This is the gulag of the NBA." Surrounded by a clutch of middle-aged white guys in bad Christmas sweaters, Garnett seems detached, still thinking about tonight's scattershot performance. But he finally perks up, and for what must

feel like the 19 millionth time, tries to explain the frustrations of being a 19-year-old kid playing pro ball for millions of dollars, less than a year after attending his senior prom.

"It's like I'm frontin', like I'm not myself," he starts deliberately, a hip-hop kid testifying before a classic-rock tribunal. "It's just like if I was talking to you and telling you some, excuse my

language, bullshit that you wanted to hear, then I'd be frontin' for you. And that's what I'm doing on the court."

"So who are you, um, doing that for? The coaches?" offers a bewildered radio guy still looking for Front Street on a road map.

"That could be some of it," says Garnett, intently reflective, his words softly droning. But

suddenly he bolts up straight, head shaking, voice growing louder. "Some guys just don't care, man. Some guys are going to do what they're going to do, regardless. I don't have that kind of pull yet, that juice, that little 'forget it,' that little forgetfulness to get over things. I'm trying to learn so much from the coaches, trying to stay open. But it's like, say, you've got a pen and I say, 'Stop



writing!] and then I say, 'Write,' you know what I'm saying? It's a natural reflex for you to write and it's the same for me. You have to know, you can't think."

He looks up at the sea of blank faces to see if his thoughts, self-aware and sound bite-defying, are sinking in. The fifth pick in this past June's NBA draft, Garnett signed a three-year, \$5.6 million contract. He's the first player to enter the league directly from high school since Darryl "Chocolate Thunder" Dawkins and Bill "Poodle" Willoughby did it in the mid-'70s (Moses Malone left Petersburg [Virginia] High to join the ABA's Utah Stars in 1974). His floppy, 6'11", 220-pound rubber-bend body looks electrically charged with talent—darting post moves, startling leaping ability, the confident ease to beat his man off the dribble or flick a three-pointer, and an unselfish, almost Magic-like court awareness. But at times, it's as if he carries 20 years of expectations around with him, including the hope that he'll save Minnesota's troubled franchise.

"When the coaches tell me something, I'm trying to take it to heart, you know," Garnett confesses. "And certain stuff they say I take too much to heart. I understand it's for my own benefit, but like I said, 'I just take a lot of stuff to heart, man, too much....' He bows his head.

Abruptly, almost with a teacher's patronizing tone, a reporter asks, "Kevin, do you learn from your mistakes?" "I learn from everything I do wrong," Garnett sneers back. He pauses. "And I learn from doing shit right, too." He laughs to himself, as if he almost enjoys this overdeveloped game of speak-and-spell. Another writer pipes up, "How did you learn to cook steamed shrimp?" Apparently the Intrepid Journalist had cornered Corliss Stronge, a girlfriend who is visiting from Chicago (where Garnett attended his senior year of high school after growing up in South Carolina), and inquired about last night's menu. "My mother taught me to never depend on a woman for anything," Garnett says with winking bravado.

"What other advice did your mother give you?" the reporter prods. "My mom never played in the NBA," Garnett says sharply, his good nature witting. "She don't know nothing about this life."

Spend a week around a professional basketball team and any trace of envy you've ever felt will rapidly evaporate. Suppressing jittery fear and paranoia, obsessed with their physical shortcomings, and awkwardly confrontational, NBA players are simply reacting to the unreality around them. Resentments over playing time, salaries, endorsements, you name it, are common currency. Few friendships develop, since players are traded or released—and coaches are fired—almost willy-nilly. The media are a clueless nuisance on a good day. The language of the locker room—stunted dialogue via shared gripes and racial, sexual, and homophobic banter, plus a whole repertoire of cold stereotypes—reflects the absurd level of physical theater on the court.

After a morning practice earlier this season, the T-Wolves' then-startling

forwards, Sam Mitchell (who's black) and Tom "Googs" Gugliotta (who's white), engage in a jokey point/counterpoint concerning various "white man's diseases." Seen Rooks, a hulking 6'10" sub who aspires to be a sports psychologist, soberly joins in: "Man, they don't care about us here, this town is Gooiepolis." Mitchell nods: "They love their 'Vinnie Barbarinos' and their 'Vitos,' man, they love that shit." Isaiah "J.R." Rider, the team's enigmatic leader scorer, puffs up his chest, and in his best sports-bar-lifer voice, screams: "Fucking Gooooooo! I fucking love the fucking guy!" Then he drop-kicks a garbage can full of towels to the other end of the locker room.

Garnett, sullen at his locker, never looks up. It's at times like these, when the banter drifts toward more problematic concerns, that he seems most like somebody's younger brother. As he's said acerbically: "It's a league full of old guys who foul a lot." A young man looking for a support group, or even a brotherly conversation, is not likely to find it here. Garnett really has no one in which to confide, except his best friend/roommate Jaime "Bug" Peters, who moved up from South Carolina.

"You know, a lot of people think an NBA team is like a family or a business or something," says Jeff Waitman, who scouted Garnett for the Los Angeles Clippers. "They don't understand that the dynamics are not comparable to anything. It's an insulated, small circle of men with enormous egos who are making millions of dollars, vying for the same minutes, and nonetheless playing a team game. There's no leeway, no give-and-take in any situation, not even socially. There's very little contact with the 'real world' and it's easy to get swept away, and before you know it you're, well, a total asshole, basically."

Garnett, part loner, part bratty cut-up, so far has been an unthreatening novelty. But as his confidence on the court grows, so will his locker-room stature. Even now, he's not bashful about talking trash, at least when the target is at a safe remove. One day after practice, when he jumps up to grab a bottle of juice from the fridge, he spies an assistant trainer glancing over at him. "What you looking at me for? Can you believe this fool, he's checking out my ass." Turning to me, he advises, "There's a lot of fags in here, man, you better watch yourself." At that moment, Bill

Blair, the slouchy, white-haired Army vet and head coach (who would be fired weeks later) strolls by and cracks, "What you worried about? You haven't got an ass to check out. Somebody give him some suspenders to hold up those shorts." Garnett sits down, smiles, and with Blair out of earshot, retorts quietly, "Listen to that shit—old Captain No Ass trying to talk."

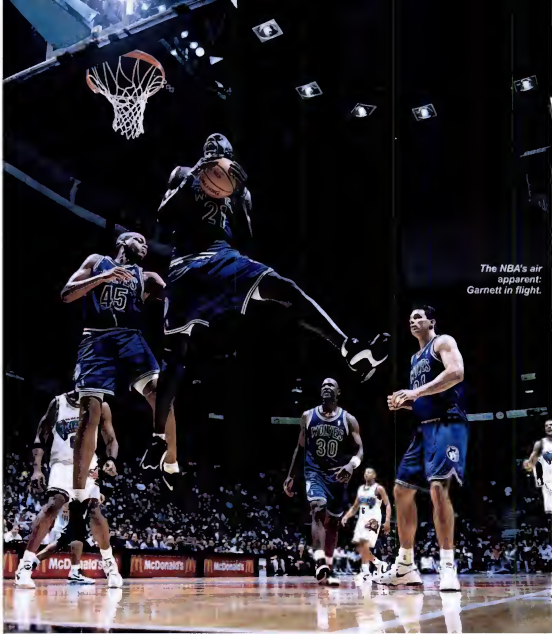
Every locker room needs a hierarchy, a pecking order to keep personalities in check. But last year's Timberwolves, in addition to stinking up the Target Center with a 21-61 record, were too busy clawing at each other, feuding with coaches or the press, and howling into the void. In a way, Rider, perhaps the team's most personable player when he wants to be, and Christen Laettner, the team's second-leading scorer, best rebounder, and steady Duke University pretty-boy, have already taken some of the pressure off Garnett. As high-profile, first-round draft picks, they quickly established reputations, deserved or not, as one of the biggest whiners (Laettner, who has since been traded, along with Rooks, to the Atlanta Hawks) and flakes (Rider) in the NBA. Garnett has been a goody-goody by comparison.

In such a dysfunctional fraternity, the concept of a mentor is rather laughable. But the T-Wolves actually floated the idea when they signed veterans Terry Porter, 33, the Portland Trail Blazers' All-Star point guard, and Mitchell, 32, an original Timberwolf. It was suggested that Mitchell, who Garnett has now supplanted in the starting lineup, might take the younger under his well-muscled wing. "Men, that's some writers' bullshit," Mitchell says with a gruff, good-humored snort. "I came here to play, not baby-sit." Former NBA teenager Bill Willoughby, who was drafted in 1975 by the Atlanta Hawks in the second round and signed for \$1.1 million, can relate. "Other players expect you to be a man. If you ask them something, they'll be like, 'You making all that money, why you asking me questions? Tell me something!'"

A shoe commercial that runs frequently during network sporting events features a group of young, not-yet-NBA superstars—Jason Kidd, Eddie Jones, and Kevin Garnett, among others. As they go through the theatrical motions of a pickup game, the rapper KRS-One reads a Nike-inspired version of Gil Scott-Heron's anti-materialist poem, "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised." As Garnett soars in for a dunk and hangs on the rim, KRS-One

former NBA teenager Bill Willoughby can relate to Garnett's ordeal. "Other players expect you to be a man. You ask them something, they'll be like, 'You making all that money, why you asking me questions?'"





The NBA's air
apparent:
Garnett in flight.

exhorts, "The revolution is about basketball and basketball is the truth."

Groomed early on as a product endorser, Garnett knows full well that basketball, especially Nike-style, has little to do with the truth, and everything to do with money. Nike's slogan-eering glosses over its true routine—style hiring high school and summer-league coaches as "consultants," who then direct emerging stars to Nike summer camps and colleges, where Nike-contracted coaches preside. Players provide free advertising by sporting free Nike gear. Right or wrong, it's all a shell game for the swoosh posse.

"Listen, kids in Hawaii are playing in tournaments when they're 10 years old," says Marty Blake, the longtime director of NBA scouting. "High school kids are driving cars and have bank accounts. All this shit. We overlook it. The NCAA [the collegiate governing body] doesn't want to do anything about it. Let's face it, there ain't no virgins anymore."

Even before the corporate giants lumbered in,

Garnett suspected that his basketball ability was one of the few things he could rely on. His birth father never married his mother and was no more than a check-in-the-mail presence. When mom remarried, the family, including Garnett's older sister Sonya, moved into a more middle-class section of their hometown, Mauldin, South Carolina, a semi-rural bedroom suburb of Greenville. But Ernest Irby's harsh disapproval of his stepson caused a rift, and Garnett started sneaking out of the house at night, hustling games of H-O-R-S-E in nearby Springfield Park.

By the time Garnett reached Mauldin High, he was a 6'7" phenom and the basketball team became a cause célèbre. Joseph Broadus, the school's principal, estimated that by Garnett's junior year his value to the athletic budget was \$15,000. But near the end of that year, he was involved in a hallway brawl that was considered racially motivated (a white student was beaten). Garnett and four others were arrested, then diverted through a pre-trial intervention program

for first-time offenders. The charges were dropped, but he still faced expulsion from school. During an O.J.-type media frenzy, Garnett felt abandoned by his Mauldin coach, Duke Fisher.

"I was young and I messed up, but I'm never going to let anybody take advantage of me again," is all Garnett will say about the incident now. Soon after, however, another coach entered the picture—William "Wolf" Nelson, from Chicago's Farragut Academy. Player and coach knew each other from, you guessed it, Nike camp, where Garnett had befriended Farragut's star guard Ronnie Fields. When he subsequently relocated (with mom and younger sister Ashley) to the apartment building in which Nelson lived on Chicago's West Side, ESPN reported that Shirley Irby accepted money from Nike to ease the transition, a charge the company denied.

While Garnett's senior year at Farragut quickened his development as a player, it further alienated him personally. He led his school to its first city championship in the Chicago public-school league he refers to as a "mini-NBA." But the environment was brutal—turf wars between black and Latino gangs, police stationed outside the school after last period. Garnett did poorly on two ACT tests and had a falling out with Coach Nelson after his scores became public knowledge.

Even though Garnett was heavily recruited, the appeal of college had quickly faded. He was scheduled to retake the ACT on June 10, but with the NBA pre-draft tryout set for the first week of June, he nixed the test. Asked if he would've gone to college if he'd passed the ACT, he says, "I don't know. [Long pause] I can't say, man. I was thinking about going to Maryland or Michigan, but it didn't happen. I don't

know what might've been." His grades—fair in history and science, poor in English—revealed a distracted interest at best. College would have likely been a brief charade, a time to socialize and polish his game.

With Garnett's decision to turn pro, the revolving door of pseudo-mentors continued. An opposing coach, Westinghouse High's Chris Head, introduced Garnett to his current agent, Eric Fleisher, son of Larry Fleisher, former executive director of the players' union. And just prior to the draft, Garnett had an intriguing conversation with Bill Wuloughby, mediated by sports-writer Rick Telander. Wuloughby recommended the NBA experience. "I feel for these guys coming up," says Wuloughby, 38, who's now pursuing a degree at Fairleigh Dickinson University in New Jersey. "You don't get no kind of advice, and people want to use you. College looks just like the pros to me, with a lot of no-name players. When I visited Maryland, Kentucky, first time on a plane, I walked into these gyms, packed houses, 20,000

people, and I was like, 'This is amateur?' I told Kevin to go where he would have the most fun playing basketball, and to take care of his money."

Which is exactly what Garnett is doing. After spending the first half of the season coming off the bench, he's now the T-Wolves' starting forward, playing more than 30 minutes a night against the best players in the world. And if armchair sociologists worry that Garnett's success will encourage other high school kids to forgo college for the NBA—Tim Thomas of Paterson (New Jersey) Catholic and Kobe Bryant of Lower Merion High in Ardmore, Pennsylvania, for instance—they shouldn't. He's only one of four players to make the jump in 20 years; "e genetic freak," as Detroit coach Doug Collins indelicately put it.

Besides, hypocritical high school and college systems are the catalysts. Early, Garnett's memories of organized "amateur" sports, his feelings of abuse and betrayal by coaches, et al., often echo quotes you hear from rappers who've spent time in prison, who credit their incarceration with toughening them up and awakening them to what's really important in life. Garnett is terribly clear-headed about what he wants from his future—a rewarding NBA career. But will that be enough? "Potential is a very dangerous thing and he's got a ton of it," says Kevin McHale, the former Boston Celtics great and Timberwolves' vice president of basketball operations. "Potential can end up on your gravestone."

It's a gloomy late-January night as the Minnesota Timberwolves and New York Knicks take the Madison Square Garden court to the bong-bubbling thump of "How High" by Method Man and Redmen. During introductions, Garnett playfully grabs and bumps the starters as they trot out, but the crowd seems prepared for a tedious evening. This is a game the Knicks should win easily, and the Knicks rarely do anything easily. The only special attraction is Garnett. And a fourth-quarter swoop through the lane, followed by a no-look hook-pass to Laettner, brings oohs and aahs. But later, with the game tied, he barges past his man, loses his balance, and flips up a reverse layup that zooms all the way over the basket. After the Knicks edge ahead, he gets the ball wide open in the lane, but clumsily blocks his own dunk attempt against the side of the rim. Sam Mitchell replaces him for the last five minutes.

After the team's 104-95 loss, general manager and new head coach Flip Saunders repeats a theme. "When he joined the league, he joined a man's league and he's got to learn how to compete like a man. We're not running a Kevin Garnett Orientation Program here." Early in the season, when Garnett



Absolute beginner: Garnett gets some words of wisdom from then-coach Bill Blair.

physically pooped out, it was excused as an adjustment to harder practices and longer games. When, a month or so later, he hit a wall psychologically and started bristling at interview and personal appearance requests, it was also forgiven. But now that he's starting, the grace period is over, and his petulant mantra of "talk-to-Eric" (his agent) will only go so far. In one tense, after-practice moment, the T-Wolves' public-relations director walked over with a few innocuous questions and Garnett, head down, snapped, "Get the fuck away from me, man, I'm not about all this bullshit. I'll jack you up, all right?"

After what Garnett's put down to experience, it sounds ridiculous to suggest that the hard part starts now. But McHale, who endured 13 years in the league, hints at just that. "So many kids have seen the NBA on TV since they were eight or ten

years old, and that's their dream, and when they actually get here, they're shattered. Making the NBA doesn't solve your problems. If you're a troubled person and you make it to the NBA, then you're a troubled person in the NBA with a million bucks. The baggage you bring here you keep here, and it may get worse."

Garnett's baggage is his understandable mistrust of anyone who wants to "contribute" to his cause. And interviews definitely don't help. Introduced in the locker room after a practice by the assistant PR director, I suggest to Garnett that maybe we could talk after he gets dressed. He looks up, eyebrows raised. "Talk about what? Nobody warned me about no interview. Did you talk to Eric?" I mention that we went back and forth for months with the agent, who insisted Garnett wanted to do the interview. "Wanted to do it? Nobody told me about no interview. This is bullshit, man, I got to go." The PR guy pulls me aside and asks if I'd like to tag along to the St. Paul Children's Hospital, where Garnett and Laettner will be signing autographs.

After the next morning's shoot-around, I offer, "Sorry about the misunderstanding yesterday." Garnett shoots back, "What do you mean? You were hanging around all day not asking me any questions." I reply that it didn't seem right to do an interview in the middle of a visit to a children's hospital. "Just talk, man, go, ask me something, ask me a fucking question, all right?" "Are they pushing you to do too much stuff that's not related to playing basketball?" Garnett glares, stands up. "This is bullshit, man, this is game day. I don't need to be sitting up in here doing no interview. Get this over with, or get on out of here." From the other side of the room, Laettner (referred to by one beat writer as "Mr. Warmth") yells: "Don't do it. Kev. Tell him to leave you alone, you don't have to do nothing you don't want to." I try one last time, asking if Garnett ever imagines what it might be like playing in college. "New, man, I ain't got time for that nonsense. I made a decision. I got no regrets."

And with that, Garnett slips on a leather car coat and strides out of the locker room and down the tunnel to his Toyota Land Cruiser for the 20-minute drive to Minnetonka, an upscale suburb east of Minneapolis where he end Bug share a luxury condo full of Sega videogames. These days they're often joined by Strongs and by Garnett's South Carolina homeboys, Andre and Jerome. It's like a young-gifted-and-black spin on MTV's *The Real World*, except that the action revolves around only one character. And the star of the show, his hoop dream coming crazily true in fast-forward, is manfully racing to keep up. ●

I ask if Garnett ever imagines what it might be like playing in college. "New, man, I ain't got time for that nonsense. I made my decision. I got no regrets."



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Sex Machine

THE INTERNET'S FIRST red-light district offers a spanking-new way to reach out and touch someone: virtual peep shows, where users don't just watch the action, they direct it. In these adults-only Web sites, credit-card Johns cough up a subscription fee plus five dollars a minute to ogle, sweet-talk, and undress playmates in real time. Users download the customized firmware, and live online video streams the world's oldest profession onto a desktop, including chat windows to type out lascivious commands.

Like their offline equivalents, virtual bootie bars run the gamut from sleazy to cheesy. At Over21TV (<http://www.over21tv.com>) there's a trailer park full of "hot XXX amateur couples" for users to maneuver. If coaching Mistress Selina and her love

slave at approximately one frame every three seconds isn't your speed, more demure fantasies are acted out at Latoya's Dreams (<http://www.latoya.com>). Endorsed by Michael Jackson's ever-humanitarian sister, the site features coeds who type as quickly as they get nude. Interactive porn runs dry, though, when the stripper has to stumble back to her keyboard every time she wants to whisper sweet nothings in your ear.

With Net censorship issues still to be settled, some peep sites, like NetMate (www.cyberlove.com) are laying low with tamer, R-rated formats. "We're letting the other services push the envelope," NetMate's cofounder David Russell says. "We're going for more of a topless, relationship-based type of thing."



Zine Beat

The online magazine *Feed* (<http://www.feedmag.com>) is about as good a magazine

that can't be read in the bathroom can be. Run by various all-star digerati, *Feed* deconstructs the print zine model so that a story about, say, Muzak also links to Steely Dan soundclips and an ongoing e-mail debate about the aesthetics of elevator orchestras. If you're hungry for the latest on DNA prospecting or for a multimedia analysis of Sandra Bullock, this is the place to get fed.



Good Egg

It weebles, it wobbles, it won't fall down; Sony's egg-shaped universal remote control is a maximum tool with minimalist proportions. The RM-V30 (\$34.99) condenses TV, VCR, and cable functions into one controller that's molded to fit right in your palm. The streamlined button pad cuts down on command confusion, and the controller's fat-bottomed design keeps it from disappearing between couch cushions. But with no channel numbers, surfers have to take the long wave to a particular station.



Skinny Ripping

For the past couple of years, an underground message area on America Online informally known as the Dirt Folder has been the secret dumping ground for music-industry wassels to chatter about breakups, slingshots, and rolling heads. Now the Dirt Folder has stopped finding new places to hide and, in a fitting stroke of irony, has become a sanctioned part of AOL called Mad About Music (type keyword: Flash). It tries to keep its cool, however, by making prospective rumormongers fill out applications for admittance. Behind the velvet rope, there have been a few good dishes, from early reports of Interscope's ousting by Time Warner to the latest rumblings about a Sex Pistols reunion. Otherwise, most of the rants teeter between stream-of-consciousness band reviews and the occasional Courtney sighting. For anything juicier than that, try the old way: Suck up to a roadie and get backstage.

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SPINS

PLATTER DU JOUR

B RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE

Evil Empire
Epic

F. SCOTT FITZGERALD once pointed out that there are no second acts in American lives. If he'd stuck things out just long enough to develop a serious crush on Idalis, he might also have observed that there are darned few second albums. As deep and swift as MTV exposure may be, as many fans as have a band's logo tattooed beneath their shoulder blades and its lyrics inscribed on their hearts, last year's *Next Big Thing* is last week's fish, ready to be wrapped up in newspapers and trucked off to the dump.

And *Rage Against the Machine's* second album, a full three years after its first, should by all means be over. Daddy-O, even less fashionable than polkas, which are, after all, what you hear blasting out of Mexican dance halls these days. The idea of a Rage-style rap-metal hybrid was on the verge of cliché back when George Bush was still president, mostly due to bands that have been dropped from their labels by now. *Rage Against the Machine's* auteur, singer Zack de la Rocha, may do the whole moody artiste thing—he generally refuses to be interviewed, declares war on radio stations, and for all I know, sticks pins in an effigy of the MTV "Choose or Lose" bus every night; but his brand of radical politics has been superseded by reviling Republicans and calculated ennui—de la Rocha cares about the *Indians*, for crying out loud, and NAFTA, and friggin' *Hernando Cortez*.

But *Evil Empire* is more or less the first major rock'n'roll album in years to be made as if grunge never happened, as if the other branch of the post-Guns N' Roses sapling, the hard-edged, political, major-label, hip-hop-influenced riff bands like *Korrosion of Conformity* and *Urban Dance*

On *Evil Empire*, which is, if anything, more Public Enemy-influenced than its predecessor, de la Rocha attempts nothing less than the history of American oppression, especially against Mexico, written in blood and puke, spit and pus (saliva is nearly as common an image in Rage lyrics as blood is in Slayer's), and he nearly pulls it off. He expectorates lyrics as if they were stones in a mouthful of beans. He name-checks revolutionary philosopher Frantz Fanon, a host of Aztec gods, and Peruvian insurgents Sendero Luminoso.

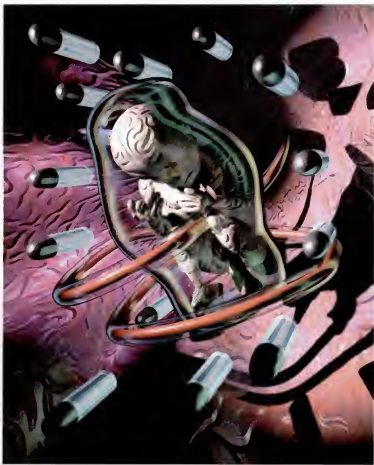
Springsteen may have been wistful on his last album about mistreatment of Mexican field workers in America, but de la Rocha wants to burn the place down. "Ya down wit' DDT / Yeah you know me," he sings on "Without a Face," "Raped for the grapes / Profit for the bourgeois." It is customary for pop musicians to view the mass media as an inconvenience, but trumping the Gang of Four, de la Rocha suggests, on "Viget now," that we "merge on the networks, slangin' nerve gas." It's almost enough to make you believe there's still an underground in U.S. rock'n'roll.

Tom Morello is a very fine guitar player, heavy riffs exploding into starbursts of distortion, shards of melody that always manage to settle back to earth just in time for the beat; drummer Brad Wilk is more or less in

the long line of Bonhamites, but drops his reverbed, microscopically delayed backbeats into the pocket more skillfully than most of his colleagues. *Rage Against the Machine* songs halt in the middle sometimes, shift gears as fluently as Metallica, have more false endings than even Beethoven could have imagined.

Evil Empire also marks the first attempt in a while to combine freaky-style metallic funkiness with something of the rolling, loping quality of the circular *Jane's Addiction* riff. It doesn't work, of course—by its very nature, the start-stop white-noise thing cannot be programmed to seem as if it logically goes on forever—but most of the songs here do have a propulsiveness you might associate with a cross between *Monster Magnet* and *Helmet*, a redefined post-Sab groove that, to use a term that seems almost to have gone out of favor in the backwash of *Wu* Weezerian weltschmerz...rocks.

JONATHAN GOLD



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8 CRACKER The Golden Age Virgin

Any rocker trying to be cool these days would dream for a cameo from Beck; indie-rock fogey David Lowery gets Beck's dad as orchestral arranger. "I hate my generation," Lowery spits on *The Golden Age*, but he doesn't really know which one to hate. He's on the cusp—at 35, technically a late boomer, style-wise a slacker, and musically shooting like a pinball between skinny-tie power pop, California singer-song-writing, and indie-punk guitar toast. Since his old hippie-punk art colony Camper Van Beethoven fell apart in 1990, Lowery's been working the little-rock "seilout" angle in a sharp little combo called Cracker, whose shout-along hits elevate the art of bitter sarcasm into a motivational force. But on *The Golden Age*, he finally sinks an emotional root that can connect all his cold little ideas.

That thread is the threat of getting older, specifically for those cuspies who never really had their moment and now must choose between hanging on to unfulfilled youth and fading into adulthood. Lowery's anti-hero is a hipster reduced to a dismal apartment's collection of useless stuff. He survives off whatever young women he can still impress ("How can I live without you / If it means I have to get a job"), regrets what he's squandered, and hopes against hope for another chance. His humor tempers the mood. But mostly, he reflects. "Baby, I'm crawling / For the unbearable days I threw away / That I should have savored," Lowery sings in the title

track, and former Camper David Immergluck's pedal steel goes down like another tequila shot.

The *Golden Age*'s centerpiece is "Big Dipper," a ballad that, like Freddy Johnston's "Fun Ride," uses a roller coaster as a metaphor for a love that's going in circles. Its chord progression dropping down as pretty and slow as a Santa Cruz sunset, the song feels like a life slipping by. Lowery's random thoughts distract him from the story's foreground: His girl sits just across the way, giving in to another cad. "I haven't got the courage yet," he murmurs as Johnny Hickman's guitar rides lazy circles around his enemie, and in a strange way, that dull excuse becomes his enlightenment.

Cracker's increasingly accessible sound, pumped by the addition of ex-Silo Bob Rupe on bass and those nicely arranged strings, opens up Lowery's self-absorption and helps him make the leap from the contempt he's always cultivated (for modern life, women, himself) to an uneasy acceptance of humanity's soft spots—need's unpredictability, the lure of compromise. As he says himself in one song here, Lowery's still his own little rocket ship, loyal to no generation or genre. But he's finally found a place to land.

ANN POWERS

6 GUIDED BY VOICES Under the Bushes Under the Stars Matador

The rumor rattled 'round all last year: Robert Pollard and his merry band of sad freaks—Ohio's reigning lo-fi-o's—were working on something big and prog; a cracked cousin to *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway*. What's more, they planned to venture out of their four-track fortress and into the bright, shiny lights of an actual studio: that Mount Sinele of indie acoustics, Easley Studios (righteous fengshui real echo chambers). Fellow Daytonian Kim Deal was reportedly on her way down to Memphis to run the board. A few tracks had even been assigned to Grandmaster Albin. Droll-panels were ordered for a legion of slaving fans.

Well, like the lady said, there's got to be a morning after. Turns out, of the 24 pulpy pastorals that comprise *Under the Bushes Under the Stars*, only a handful of cheery Easley-remnants (the Deal-produced "The Official Ironmen Rally Song"

and the righteous "Don't Stop Now") and Albini-engineered bonus tracks ("It's Like...," "Sheetkickers") remain. At the 11th hour, GBV hunkered down at Dayton's Cro-Magnon Studios, remaking and remodeling the bulk of their record in a manner that once again re-ups their bedroom-tech, "bad"-sound-made-perfect reputation. Plinch-compression vocals, ragged string-squeaks, feral power-hum—studio-sweetened

scored a juvenile hit in 1966, "Baby You're My Everything," as Little Jerry Williams. He's succeeded as songwriter and producer for the stars (Patti LaBelle, the Commodores) and he has a faultless ear for slippery Memphis-soul arrangements with uptown blues and New Orleans pomp in them. But he's been an incorrigible dud as a solo performer. His voice comes out in an odd, strangled tone wrapped around a whine, though it's insistent, unforgettable. Williams has recorded more than a dozen albums since he became the Dogg in 1970, only two for the same label, and that was his own. Still, there have always been bent connoisseurs avid for this mouthy, sex-obsessed, odd-ball conservative who acts as the psychotherapist of soul.

Prime Swamp Dogg—and all but a couple of the 18 tracks on *Best of 25 Years* are prime—details the trials of a guy who seeks simple, earthy joys in a complex, joyless world. The juicy riffs and roly-poly beats provide the release his fractured fables deny. Consider his cover of "Redneck" by sophisticated-hick ironist Joe South, a Swamp Dogg soulmate who understands about the games people play.



Or "Complication #5," which undercuts a gorgeous piano-and-horn hook with a bleak post-nuclear-war scenario and then brightens that with acid-humor lines like "No longer does my race or religion depend on where I eat or sleep." On one track he delivers a torchy and tender rendition of the fidelity anthem "Pledging My Love," while a few songs later he becomes the "Wifesitter," a slandering adultery specialist.

Best of 25 Years is at least the third attempt at a Dogg retrospective, and since the sharpest previous attempt (1982's *13 Prime Weiners*) concentrated on his early sides and sold zip, this one sadly avoids his raving, wacky classic "Total Destruction to Your Mind." It also includes nothing from 1974's *HAVE YOU HEARD THIS STORY?* Too bad—but that album ought to be reissued simply for its brilliant first side, a

or not, GBV continue to thrive on willful imperfection.

What's left then are the songs, and *Bushes'* basket is filled with rich chocolate and bitter fruit. When it soars—as on the stadium-ready "Redmen and Their Wives," the plumply anthemic "Your Name Is Wild," and the sultry, Grifters-esque phase-shifts of "To Remake the Young Flyer"—the band finds its long-sought resolution of the Brinsley Schwarz/Gabriel-era Genesis dialectic: power pop for potheaded pixies. But more often than not, something acrid hovers over the songs, as an increasingly paranoid Pollard swats the air and steers his non-sequential sarcasm into a cul-de-sac of blackened brooding, career trajectory sour grapes, and sucker-punches for his critics. "Crawling people on your knees / Don't take this so seriously / You just have to hum it all day long." Having sacrificed the spritely quirks of *Alien Lanes* blurt-perfect miniatures and *Bee Thousand's* buzzing hook-hive, GBV's brittle, overbaked *Under the Bushes* manages to showcase but a single new lo-fi trick: the art of carrying a tune while holding your nose.

CHUCK STEPHENS

8 SWAMP DOGG

Best of 25 Years of Swamp Dogg...Or F* the Bomb, Stop the Drugs**
Pointblank/Virgin

Superficially, Jerry Williams, Jr., known as Swamp Dogg, is yet another journeyman musician, but it's been a damn strange journey. He



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The only screaming candidate for the dustbin here is the lame, tacky tribute to Mr. Stewart and the Family Stone, "If It Hadn't Been for, Sly." And the lineup does feature the extremes in Dogg's (as he would put it) "Yuck Fou" attitude: "Call Me Nigger" and "Shut Your Mouth," not designed to endear him to anyone. *Best of 25 Years*, essential for soul lovers, shows how Swamp Dogg ultimately sides with the forces of love, laughter, and togetherness. Whenever he tries to relax and get normal, his ambitions and passion for justice remind him that he's a sharp-tongued fighter, born in hostile territory.

MILO MILES

6 PAUL WESTERBERG *Eventually* Reprise

Whether you heard Paul Westerberg's first solo adventure as a return to late-great-Replacements form or a calcification of 'Mats methodology depended on your toleration for silver naked ladies. Stone sober, I found 14 Songs paralyzed in the extremes—bumptious, flits-up

fronting in one highball glass, mawkish open-heart surgery in another—as if the bartender had forgotten how to shake and stir. The good news is that Westerberg's new *Eventually* begins to move away from those stale oppositions and into a less predictable landscape; the bad news is that the album still comes off, to quote Vic Chesnutt, not crazy enough.

By "crazy" I don't mean sloppy and speedy like "the old days." Christ, no. Almost the opposite: What's past due is, um, some replacement of an adolescent image of excitement, some richer identity equally unsettled and unsettling. To his credit, Westerberg knows all that and *Eventually* explores a few promisingly slippery personae. Matching a melancholy cruise-control chorus with a bitchy Soul Asylum rap, "Century" does the generational-spokesman thing with more self-aware trickery and less bombastic obviousness than "Bastards of Young" and "World Class Fad." "Hide N Seekin'" is a cool, slinky noir about sex and reproduction, magical in its ambiguity. "Time Flies Tomorrow" reinvents Westerberg sportingly as a Neil Diamond/Glen Campbell 70s-radio pop crooner, sneakily framing his dramatic poetical verses in rhinestones and big hair. Unfortunately, all the stingingly

subtle songs here are burdened by doppelgangers, evil twins that make the same points with sledgehammers. And so the album delivers rote Westerberg work-ups like the one-joke "You've Had It With You" (lacerating wordplay, man) and the histrionic "Angels Walk," a paean to children (huh?—I can't hardly listen) bathed in early-U2 portentous schlock. Lazy overstatement and literalness may sound like the Ten Commandments when served by and for a buncha drunks; in this more rarefied company, they thwart Westerberg's wilier instincts like a lame, dragging leg. In the battle between the snap arrangements of "Ain't Got Me" and the vapid verbiage of "MamaDaddyDid" lies Westerberg's Faustian choice: whether to trade in reliably cult-pleasing old postures for the glancing, mysterious pleasures of stories not fully formed.

TERRI SUTTON

7 2PAC *All Eyez on Me* Death Row/Interscope

Rap's first double album, *All Eyez on Me* is not a conceptual art suite like *Dark Side of the Moon* and so

many other gemini rock sets of the last two decades. *All Eyez* is a play for chart domination. After 11-and-a-half months in prison on charges of sexual abuse, and the slams of pundits William Bennett and C. DeLores Tucker, the heat has only made Tupac Shakur more determined to earn his validation from the record-buying public that certified his last album double platinum. *All Eyez* also represents L.A. label Death Row's volley at the New York camp of Sean "Puffy" Combs and Bad Boy Entertainment, home of Notorious B.I.G. In true above-the-law style, 2Pac wants money to be the measure of his success. As he says on one track, "Only God Can Judge Me." That may be a problematic statement, but it's one an artist is more entitled to make than a politician.

It's lucky Shakur's a gangsta. Being shot, reviled, and arrested are all part of that wicked game. As long as you don't expect philanthropy from him, you'll find honesty and some pleasantly twisted scenarios. "All Bout U" tells a story about constantly running into the same ex-girlfriend; the rapper may be through with her, but in the meantime the woman's risen to stardom on the scene, present in "every other video." He calls her a "shitty ho," but admits



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"Thinkin' I had her but she had me in the long run." "Wonder Why They Call U Bytch" which allegedly guest-stars Faith Evans, Shakur's (and Biggie Smalls's) former girlfriend, half-rebuts feminists who have condemned Shakur for misogyny. But only half: Faith, if that's who it is, may have



sung "Wonder why they call you the bitch," but 2Pac vengefully concludes, "You wonder why."

Unlike Michael Jackson, America's other publicly chestised black male musician, Shakur has retained enough presence of mind to deliver what his audience wants: romantic tableaux of pager-toting mark daddies who use the word "thug" as noun, verb, and adjective, backed with jeep-shaking old-school, funk-infused tracks emblematic of the SoCal sound. While 2Pac's flow is leeden compared to Snoop Dogg's, they share access to personnel like producer Dr. Dre and songwriter Roger Troutman, formerly of Zapp. Hate it if you need to, but the vocoder riff of "California Love (RMX)," the album's first single, will most certainly rule Crenshaw Boulevard well into this summer.

SUE CUMMINGS

8 THE RAINCOATS *Looking in the Shadows* DGC

No group from British punk's first generation did more than the Raincoats to subvert the macho thrust and bluster that seemed at first the only way to play the game. In Raincoats music, anger cooed, vulnerability took a warrior's stand, politics spoke in hungry lovers' whispers and crazy schoolyard chants. It was about womyn and beyond gender, ready to speak to anyone who ever felt trapped by their sex or things that were limiting, prejudicial, stupid. Kurt Cobain loved them dearly and roused them from retirement.

The first three Raincoats records formed a creative arc, from shambling primitivism to more willfully arty

stuff. But *Looking in the Shadows* sounds like a new start. It's partly by necessity—founding members Ana Da Silva and Gina Birch hadn't played in so long that they had to relearn their instruments. It's also, one imagines, because so much has happened in "rock" in the 12 years since their last LP that it seemed safe to—why the hell not?—make something like a rock record.

Shadows sounds a bit like the Velvet Underground if Moe Tucker and Nico had taken over the show, and like Tucker's own records it expands rock's lingua franca to include women over 40, which is as radical as the music gets these days. "I thought I'd have a baby / But my body sold no," Birch confides on "Babydog" in a bag-lady stage whisper—half Laurie Anderson-wise, half Victoria Williams—nuts—before describing her plans to get a dog that she can take "to the park in a pram."

The most startling thing, though, is how big producer Ed Buller makes this little band (augmented by new drummer Heather Dunn and violinist Anne Wood), swelling their humble clobber to strange heights of majesty. At first it seems immodest, but the pop grandeur is really quite becoming—folk art on a pedestal. As the women sing on "We Smile," from *Extended Play*, their 1994 comeback EP: "Our confusion / A museum / Our thoughts / Hanging up." If the frame fits....

WILL HERMES

5 DAVE MATTHEWS BAND *Crash* RCA

Except for the group's name, which points a straight arrow at the leader, the Dave Matthews Band are poster children for communal values. They're not just integrated racially, but sonically, too: neither the violin, sax, nor drums holds the spotlight, and Matthews sticks to acoustic rather than electric guitar, the better not to overwhelm everyone else. If the DMB hadn't existed, *Sesame Street* would have had to invent them.

A white-South African expatriate replanted in Charlottesville, Virginia, Matthews came by his taste for musical democracy honestly. Lyrically, 1994's multiplatinum *Under the Table and Dreaming* was bullish on egalitarianism: "Everybody's happy / Everybody's free / We'll keep the big door open / Everyone'll come around," Matthews sang, typically, in "Typical Situation." What kept the

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record from devolving into PC wallpaper (and made DMB more interesting than their H.O.R.D.E. fellow travelers) was Matthews's mannered vocals—somewhere between Steve Winwood and Roland Gift—and his knack for oddball imagery that certainly *seemed* to be about something other than its own oddness.

If Matthews's experience with apartheid made him love democracy, the new *Crash* suggests that his experience in the States has left him, along with the rest of us, skeptical about its long-term vitality. Having forsaken electric-guitar egotism, he's begun replacing it with an equally self-indulgent vocalese. And his lyrics have become at once more desolate and more elusive. Except for "Cry Freedom," a plea for justice in South Africa, and "Say Goodbye," requesting that a friend become a lover for one night, it's difficult to decipher what Matthews is getting at.

Musically, *Crash* again sports the shifting, attention-grabbing group dynamics that producer Steve Lillywhite foregrounds against the band's everyone-all-at-once philosophy. Violinist Boyd Tinsley's pizzicato playing adds particularly nice color and Lerol Moore's various saxes are multitracked for punchy effect. But though the group has a distinct sound, they need someone to show them where to go with it lest their jams deteriorate into noodling. Democracy or no, the Dave Matthews Band is called the Dave Matthews Band for a reason.

JEFF SALAMON

7 **ASS PONYS** *The Known Universe* A&M

Chuck Cleaver worries about giving in to his better side. He often won't perform his cutest songs ("Earth to Grandma," "Ford Madox Ford"), and his *Ass Ponys* have veered from accessible albums (*Mr. Superlove*, the first, and *Electric Rock Music*, the third) to collections (*Grim* and now *The Known Universe*) that require a lengthy sit with a lyric sheet. Cleaver's indie heroes, such as the Embarrassment, were enigmatic types who made the entertainment half your job as a close-listening fan. He both flaunts and hates the chunky body that, played off against a falsetto-range trill, makes up the external shell of his soulfulness. And his sadly predestined, nowhere characters—beloved and feared

kindred—prefer riding impulses to the risk of self-examination.

The Known Universe is mostly about creepy-crawlies: the biggest bug you've ever seen, headless turtles, doors of memory you consider looking behind then pull shut. But only Cleaver could write gross yarns of such a tight knit: "I'm gonna walk around the yard / Until I find a hill of ants / Take a magnifying glass / Heat



'em up and watch 'em dance' ("God Tells Me To"); "You ask me a question / How did you die of indigestion? / Well, it happens" ("Redway"); "Out behind the barber shop / The barber's burning hair / He lights it laughing to himself / He knows you can't escape the smell" ("It's Summer Here"). The music is far less striking, though just as carefully constructed. A basic four-piece rock combo, *Ass Ponys* rely on sweeping choruses, jangly guitar, and lilting rhythms, even when the lyrics are dark: new axman Bill Alletzhauser seems to have pushed them further from rocking out and more toward twirling, jazzy side-runs.

So why should anyone care, especially given a less-accessible record like this new one? Because one of rock's rarest species is the person who can understand loutishness without actually being a lout himself. Every time a Chuck Cleaver tale sinks quietly anthemic hooks into you, conjuring the feel and smell and unexpected grace of a wrinkle in slime, our known universe gets a little larger. That's worth your time. And Chuck: Don't worry so much. It's worth yours too. ERIC WEISBAUD

7 **DAR WILLIAMS** *Mortal City* Razor & Tie

6 **PATTI ROTHBERG** *Between the 1 & the 9* EMI

There's nothing wrong with taking "singer-songwriter" as a job description; it's when the term becomes

a genre that the trouble begins. Whining about personal problems as if all the world were your analyst's couch is bad enough, but whining to the sound of muted guitars, with tasteful harmony vocals on the chorus and a Danny Kortchmar guitar solo in the middle, is just about unbearable. Maybe that's why the sensitive singer/songwriters of today prefer different labels, like "folkie," "country singer," or "Eddie Vedder."

Regardless of niche, good singer/songwriters know how to tell a story, write a chorus, and keep the habits of their latest lover to themselves. As younger ones go, Dar Williams is perhaps the most promising. Coming from the folkie side of the tradition, she delivers her songs with a light, Joan Baez soprano, and lean, finger-picked guitar, occasionally augmented by dobro, mandolin, fiddle, and cello. *Mortal City*, her second CD, sweetens that sound somewhat, with lush production, exotic instruments (including a didgeridoo on "As Cool as I Am"), and guest appearances by John Prine and Cliff Eberhardt.

Yet as slick as the music sometimes gets, there's never the sense that these are studio concoctions. Some of that has to do with the way Williams keeps front-end-center,



sounding as if she was just going to cut a tune with her acoustic when all these other folk dropped by. Mostly, though, it's because Williams is able to make her songs seem like personal statements even when they're clearly not. So the magic of "February" lies in letting the narrative unfold like an Ann Beattie short story, while the charm in "The Christians and the Pagans" comes not from its theological content but the way Williams captures the voice of a young pagan named Amber.

Patti Rothberg, by contrast, is more new wave in her sound and attitude, preferring electric guitar to acoustic; on *Between the 1 & the 9* it's easy to hear echoes of Patti Smith in the moody cadences of "Flicker," while the title tune owes more than a little to Lou Reed's "Rock and Roll."

So why consider her a singer/songwriter instead of just another Melissa Etheridge rocker? Because, even when her band has the pedal to the metal, as on the Ramones-ish "Up Against the Wall," she keeps her focus squarely on the words.

Rothberg sings as if the story was the most important part of her songs, and she's right. Even at her catchiest, there's something so secondhand about her melodies that you'll wonder where you heard that hook before. But her lyrics convey a wholly unique personality, offering entertaining twists on such old standbys as bad boyfriends ("Looking for a Girl") and romantic revenge ("This One's Mine"). Best of all, she makes it all seem so much fun you'll wonder why anyone ever took the phrase *singer/songwriter* as a slur. (Razor & Tie, PO Box 585, Cooper Station, New York, NY 10276)

J.D. CONSIDINE

6 YOKO ONO/IMA Rising Mixes Capitol

Yoko Ono is a perfect subject for remixing, a process that relies on the most irreverent brand of fandom: Her voice, lyrics, and legend all radiate the wildwoman sensibility today's adventurous musicians love and crave, while her arrangements tend to fall into one of two categories—indulgent or cornball. With a deconstructing/recontextualizing aesthetic in mind, alternative rockers, trip-hoppers, noise guitarists, and other sound benders have a go at four tracks from the Yoko Ono CD *Rising* on this album, which also includes CD-ROM material and a pair of fittingly abstract new cuts.

The results are, of course, mixed, with the musicians closest to club music most effective. Tricky's version of "Where Do We Go From Here" turns Ono's realistically bleak song into the Tricky tune it was waiting to be, complete with the rapper's own whispered voice behind Ono's vocal. The New York City-based Japanese duo Cibo Matto work similarly transformative—but far more upbeat—magic on "Talking to the Universe," with radically shifting segments that update Ono for the hip-hop present while bringing back some of her punk-funk-era flava. ABA Allstars (Beastie Boy Adam Yauch end producer Mario Caldato, Jr.) team up with Cibo Matto, Ono, and son Sean to create "The



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Source," a chunky near-instrumental low on melody but high on jeep beats and patented Ono warbles.

When wrap their not-so-funky selves around "Ask the Dragon" and forget to pump up the crucial foundation of any dance mix—the kick drum. Thurston Moore adds the buzz of nearly a dozen Japanese noise bands to "Rising," with a predictably scary outcome that recalls Ono's abrasive early work with hubby John. The final, previously unreleased track, "Franklin Summer," is a 30-minute jam featuring acoustic guitar, Indian percussion, and the mostly wordless moaning that gave Ono her limits-testing reputation. *Rising Mixes*, like the artist being paid tribute, ends up both maddening and sublime.

BARRY WALTERS

7 JOHN ZORN/MASADA

Vav
DIW

In John Zorn's music there are no escape clauses. Always more a composer than an improviser, Zorn is not the kind of bandleader who'll allow his pieces to take shape according to the mood of the play-

ers. He calculatingly merges disparate elements as if choosing clothes from a wardrobe. But it's how you wear them—with his pen-therlike energy and perfectionist rigor, he usually pulls it off.

Masada is a poised, prolific (Vav is the sixth letter in the Hebrew alphabet, and that's how many albums they've made in two years) jazz quartet led by Zorn on alto saxophone, mixing early Ornette Coleman and Jewish folk song with disrespect to neither. In more secondary roles, there are a few other elements: the brutal efficacy of speed metal in "Debir," rolling R&B grooves in "Mikreh," a purer strain of free improvising in "Beer Sheva." But the pervasive Ornette influence is in Zorn end trumpeter Dave Douglas's fast-viveline union themes, reminiscent of pieces like "Eventually" or "Lonely Woman" that Coleman played with his classic quartet in 1959, even down to the individual roles: Greg Cohen's deep, prolonged bass chords, like Charlie Haden's; Joey Baron's boiling microrhythms, like Billy Higgins's. And the Jewish folk song—you know it when you hear it; it's the giant sigh of Klezmer, the cathartic Eastern European dirge.

While "Jewish Ornette" looks contrived on paper, in motion it's an

effective symbiosis verging on a political statement, like Archie Shepp's early Malcolm X dedications. And as isn't always the case with Zorn, this admixture transcends neat: at full bore, taking into account the sleeve's Gershon Scholem quote about finding tradition outside of orthodoxy, Masada sounds heroic. The paradox is that true heroism involves mutability, adaptability, and Masada, whose first five albums sound remarkably like this one, is singly programmed—a well-oiled machine. Vav shines with a sealed-off brilliance: Zorn end Douglas especially achieve their own recognizable styles, but this group isn't taking incoming calls. (DIW, c/o Sphere, Cargo Bldg. 80, Room 2A, JFK Airport, Jamaica, NY 11430)

BEN RATLIFF

6 BAHAMADIA

Kollage
Chrysalis/EMI

Philadelphia's Bahamadia, best known for her previous work with Guru from Gang Starr, is a low-key MC; in "Total Wreck" she caps a man-stalking couplet with a sly "just kiddin'." Aside from an ode to young mothers end a backstage-freak

critique that concludes (typically) "I'm not the one to judge," sex and gender aren't part of this *Kollage*. Like Queen Latifah's *All Hail the Queen*, Bahamadia's debut utilizes many crews end producers, though her chameleonic approach is the opposite of Latifah's command. Guru



splices end loops piano end horns; The Roots serve them au naturel. But the lesser-known Da Beatminerz provide *Kollage*'s most vibrant segments, "Spontaneity" (which mixes Dream Warriors chimebience with shuddering strings) end "Innovation" (which name-checks Mork end Mr. Belvedere), both propelled by Bahamadia's freestyle skill. The main romance on this album is between Bahamadia end words, the pleasures of hip-hop lyricism—aliteration end internal rhymes, "mad explosive" metaphors end similes.

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Her flow can be slow and staccato or Roedrunner-fast ("Rugged Ruff" cries out for a rewind), but Bahamedia's calm tone always masks abundant humor. **JOHNNY HUSTON**

5 PROLAPSE Backsaturday Jetset/Big Cat

Live, the best thing about this band is the actual, physical fighting between Prolapse's two singers— Mick Derrick, an unkempt, Brooding-nagian Scot, and Linda Steelyard, an elegant, atom Englishwoman. On record, Derrick rambles incoherently, his rusticity unbuffered by years in London, as Steelyard enunciates with reserved écart every problem she has ever had with him. Their romantic clashes are dramatized with the help of enry, magnetic music; Prolapse's most accessible reference point is one of the least accessible groups ever: the Fall. (There is also enough of th' Faith Healers herein to make this band something of a heavy Stereolab.) Prolapse do have a dilettantish love of sound collage, but when they kick—as on "Flex," an astounding piece of anti-condom propaganda—they can absolutely own your head for 15 minutes. Here's hoping they stay on speaking terms long enough to make an album that repeats that feat four times. (Jetset/Big Cat, 580 Broadway, Suite 900, New York, NY 10012)

ANDREW BEAUXON



7 THE AUTEURS After Murder Park Vernon Yard/Hut USA

On his third self-directed vehicle, Luke Haines wants perfect sound for the next 45 minutes. Where 1993's *New Wave* and 1994's *Now I'm a Cowboy* were drenched in a spit-shine meant for the glossy pop moment, *After Murder Park*, produced by Steve Albini, digs deeper

into guitar noise, giving some edge to that Morrissey-fed voice. "Twenty years / Married to a lazy lover," Haines softly and slowly drawls, until the mantra is almost tedious and very sad—in other words, perfect. He pokes fun not at his usual Hollywood-style quirksters but at England's trench-coat dreamers down at the corner pub. Hard to imagine empathy from such a practiced poseur, but *After Murder Park* suggest Haines is tired of stomping all over the world with disdainful pop ballads. He built this ship-in-a-bottle from flotsam in his own backyard.

RENEE CRIST

4 ADAM SANDLER What the Hell Happened to Me? Warner Bros.

Like all Jewish sons, Adam Sandler can't decide between being a good boy and indulging his id. When he's making his bubble proud he's worth the price of admission: Standing up for his people with "The Chanukah Song"—already, and deservedly, a holiday-radio staple—he name-checks James Caan, Harrison Ford ("1/4 Jewish"), and Rod Carew ("the converted"), rhymes "Carnegie Deli" with "Arthur Fonzarelli," and even gets off a throwaway Jonathan Richman wouldn't be ashamed of: "Tell your friend Veronica / It's time to celebrate Chanukah." I was a little disappointed that someone with a baseball cap seemingly welded to his scalp neglected to rhyme the holiday with "Daryle Lamonica," the former Raiders QB. Ah well: Innovation is why we have live albums, right?

Unfortunately, the other, er, comedy here, marginally better than on Sandler's last album, *They're All Gonna Laugh at You!* (which by occult means has accumulated sales of more than 800,000 copies), manages to be continually unfunny about perennial teen-male obsessions like farting, beating off, getting wasted, and gay-baiting. On the plus side, on this one at least you don't have to listen to David Spade, who somehow becomes even more annoying when you can't see his face. (Dave, three words: no comedy albums.) So here's my advice: Perform a mitzvah and get hold of the single. The rest I heartily recommend to anyone who really misses Jewish summer camp or finds the jokes on *Beavis & Butt-head* a little obscure. **JESSE BERRETT**



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SINGLES

by Charles Aaron

The music industry's most tiresome gambit has been to push a new product—CDs, for example, over vinyl and cassettes—and then announce that the public no longer desires the older product. The fact is, the public wants cheap, available formats, period, end of marketing confab. For instance, sales of CD singles increased by a mind-boggling 273.7 percent in 1995, according to Soundscan. Why? Because we finally realized cassettes suck? Not really. In the second half of '95, according to *Billboard*, practically every major label made more titles available and lowered prices from \$4.99–\$5.99 to \$3.49. Big duh, huh?

A LOOSE CONFEDERATION OF SATURDAY CITY-STATES, "Plagiarism" / "How Can I Face Tomorrow" (Slow River) Intro-ing the group-offer A side, Vic Chesnut shushes, "Listen up, cuz he's gonna tell ya a motherfuckin' story," then Kurt Wagner and Paul Niehaus (Lambchop) and Mark Linkous (Sparklehorse) whisper tangibly strange vignettes while David Lowery (Cracker) strums and the bandleader croons the soggy-tongue chorus. B side is all Chesnut—mournfully witty, etc. Possibly the most significant gathering of Southern songwriters since John Prine and Daniel Johnston played paper football on the coffee table over at Butch Hancock's house.

DRAIN, *Regional Action!* EP (Trance Syndicate/Astralwerks) While lead Butthole Gibby Haynes used his Surfers' downtime to pursue his twin passions of drug rehab and Johnny Depp, drummer King Coffey started up a nifty indie-feedback label (Trance Syndicate) and this just-as-nifty side project. Like a dance remix of Harry Partch, Drain is up-to-the-minute exotica—an inexplicable collection of rhythms both authentic and perverse.

MAD SKILLZ, "The Nod Factor" / "Skillz In '95" / "Move Ya Body" / "Extra Abstract Skillz" (Big Beat/Atlantic) Another rapper from an unexpected locale (Richmond, Virginia), Shaquan "Med Skillz" Lewis flips more scripts than a Hollywood studio exec. Jaunty, horny beats (Beetnuts, Large Professor, Clerk Kent) neatly shadow the brisk rhymes. On a live bonus cut from Stretch Armstrong's New York radio show, Skillz stinks up the station "like Piggpen" and gets "fat like Friar Tuck," while the girls treat him like Michael Jordan—"they always keep they tongue out."

THE OUTHERE BROTHERS, "Don't Stop (Wiggle Wiggle)" (Aureus) In the dead of the winter that

transformed the East Coast into a big fat grump-sicle, Chicago's Outhere Brothers released the house-meal-all-night-long-on-the-water-side anthem of the year. Shameless bass thump with freestyle panache, and BPM (Butts Per Minute) as far as the eye can leer.

THE SMASHING PUMPKINS, "1979" (Virgin) Flashing tensely mannered restraint, Billy Pumpkins sympathizes and speaks for the kids like he's covering Sonic Youth. Honestly, this 7-Eleven-melodrama shtick gets me in the throat every time.

BYRON STINGLY, "Don't Fall in Love" (Nervous) Lead vocalist for house legends Ten City, Stingly keeps a tight rein on his famous falsetto, letting the tension between the irresistibly pleading hook and lyrical meane culpa create some subtle drama. Brilliant songwriting that resists all date formulas.

VARNALINE, "Party Now" / "The Iron Horse" (Clubland) A Space Needle side project



Mark Linkous of A Loose Confederation of Saturday City-States.

spotlighting Anders Parker that rolls along like a dustbait and actually hums like coherent diary entries (from a drug-induced relationship funk, that is). A side is sarcastic guitar squelching, B side name-checks Townes Van Zandt, and the album, *Men of Sin*, is even more way-assed tumbul.

DWIGHT YOAKAM, "Gone (That'll Be Me)" (Reprise) Title song from his risky 1995 album is a rollicking kias-off with giddy-up rock drums, gabby guitar twang, and organ swirls on top. Yoakam's croon flits by with supermodel style, like he's burning up a honky-tonk catwalk. As critic James Hunter has intimated, maybe he should rename his band the House of Dwight.

ASTRALWERKS, 114 W. 26th St., 11th Fl., New York, NY 10001; AUREUS, PO Box 541, Mashpee, MA 02649-0541; CLUBLAND, 7095 Hollywood Blvd., #651, Hollywood, CA 90028-8903; NERVOUS, 1501 Broadway, Suite 1314B, New York, NY 10036; SLOW RIVER, 16 Nicholson St., Suite 1, Marblehead, MA 01945.

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Directed by Jim Mallon
Gramercy

THE MOTH-LIGHT for hype at this year's Sundance Film Festival, *I Shot Andy Warhol* isn't bound to cast a looming Soderbergh or Tarantino silhouette for rookie director Mary Harron—the film is a dead scramble for significance in the pop-culture junk-pit, and Harron never seems sure what it is she's rummaging around for. A documentarian, critic, and BBC personality, Harron hardly thinks to look beyond the scruffy coolness of her material—perhaps her own brushes with fame have kept her at a starry-eyed disadvantage. The life story of borderline personality/queer revolutionary/SCUM Manifesto author/cheap whore/Factory parasite/would-be Andy-assessin Valerie Solanas is rarely less than a skip down demotion alley, but in the end what are we to understand about her except that she was a dangerous psycho? Was she a victim of circumstance? Was Warhol?

Despite having caught the bullet, Warhol might have dismissed the notion of his own victimhood, knowing as well as he did the culture's jones for personality worship. That's just one of several embiggenings Harron's film falls to catch in its net; you'd think a movie interfacing with the Warhol mythos would have more savvy about celebrity and its attendant devils. Even *The Doors* had the sense to treat Warhol with a Warholian smirk—

in Harron's version, you'd never know that the artist's work was predicted on a love/hate relationship with authorial power. We can't ask that the film profoundly reflect its subject, but the fact remains that if this were, say, *I Shot Pablo Picasso*, the thrust of Harron's film would remain essentially the same.

As it is, Harron has neither the gumption to satirize Warhol and the Factory's vulgarious proto-slackers nor the opportunity to embrace the work: Thanks to Lou Rad and the Warhol Foundation, the films, music, and art were all off-limits. The most we see is Andy (Jared Harris, playing Warhol's mild, disaffected feyness strictly for laughs) fiddling with collages and passively supervising a few Chelsea Hotel shoots. His entourage does little beside snipe, vogue, and pop pills. Warhol used self-absorption as an ironic principle; Harron simply gives us self-absorption on a plate.

If she'd committed to a viewpoint, then perhaps the reincarnated Edie-Online-Marlo Montez camp wouldn't feel so curdled—soon enough, the question becomes not why Valerie Solanas walked into that loft with blood in her eyes when she did, but why someone didn't do it sooner.

Its court-side seat to the new Warhol rega (there's also an upcoming blo on Jean-Michel Basquiat, with David Bowie as Werhol) notwithstanding, *I Shot Andy Warhol* is the real 15 minutes Solanas never got; if there's a case to be made for celebrating bughouse-dyke feminist militancy, this film makes it. And as Solenas, Lili Taylor is a firebrand of man-hate and streetwise hubris. Reeling whole slabs of Solanas's notorious prose directly into the camera, punching her dialogue out in Cegneyesque seivos, Taylor burns with conviction as a fringe punk trying to bail out the bile rising within her before it reaches her chin. At her best, she can shift from a whispery intelligence to the strident bark of the defiant underdog in a heartbeat; here, no matter how meshuga Solanas gets, we see a moral fire burning behind her eyes. Bursting with cool cameos (Stephen Dorff makes a princiness Candy Darling), Harron's movie isn't nearly as focused as producer Tom Kellin's own similarly gay-anthem *Swoon* or as brave as Taylor's merest eye-roll.

By default, self-absorption is the film's true subject, but indies in the Tarentino ega have all taken self-absorption

as their mandate. *Loaded*, by director Anna Campion (sister of Jane), is no exception, a quintessential indie novel-geze that scans like *Deliverance* for blotter-chewing Londonites. Campion's generational ciphers hang out in a dilapidated mansion to shoot a dumb-as-a-post horror video, get high, bicker, smoke (if you cut out all the pausing for Marlboro ignition, the movie would clock in at under an hour), and, eventually, Face Themselves when a freak accident produces a corpse. The clichés, enigma, and self-pity could anesthetize a meth-head.

A radically different self-involved construct, *Mystery Science Theater 3000: The Movie* is probably the funniest movie of the year, but I'm not so sure it's a movie. Essentially a concentrated episode of the cable show, here autopsying the 1955 beaut *This Island Earth*, MST3K:TM gets off on the tension between the silhouetted scrim of (still brilliant) wisecracks and TIE's cheesy but reckonable narrative traction. For all its metatext, you're still suckered into the gray sci-fi parade of aliens, flying saucers, and brick-chinnad scientists. Warhol might have appreciated the movie's ambiguous notion of authorship—you try to figure out who "made" it, or what its primary subject is, and you enter a hell of mirrors. (Having two complete sets of credits doesn't help.) For another thing, few films empathize quite so passionately with their audience. The shot-in-St. Louis spaceship frame is still irrelevant, but once it gets up a good head of steam, MST3K:TM reinvents movie-watching. And the jokes fly at you like hellstones. ●



SCUM and chum: Lili Taylor and Stephen Dorff in *I Shot Andy Warhol*.



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C O M I N G S O O N

by Robert Christgau

A Class Act

The Woman Who Walked Into Doors
By Roddy Doyle
Viking

LONG BEFORE RODDY Doyle's *The Commitments* became a movie about a better and more boring band than the novel's *Commitments* ever were, I downed the whole thing on a flight to L.A. with my three-year-old squirming in the next seat. It was that quick and that compelling. Canon-keepers stodgy and hip may pigeonhole it as local color, but that's snobbish puff—it's as major as a short novel can be. The closest precedent is Allen Sillitoe's jaunty report from the working-class '50s, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, but Sillitoe isn't as funny or fast. And there's a bigger difference—except for "The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner," he never matched it. Doyle, on the other hand, has just published his fifth terrific book about the Dublin working class. And while *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors*

may seem more programmatic than *The Snapper* or *The Van* or *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*, it hits harder than any Doyle since *The Commitments*—and has at least as much juice and backbone as any competing report from the middle-class present.

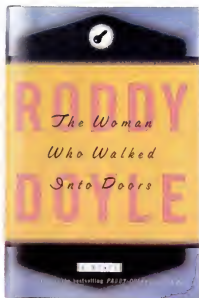
The fiction of contemporary life is generally populated either by troubled professionals and their doubly troubled children or by bohemians, wanderers, wastrels, sociopaths, and other supposedly paradigmatic outsiders. Doyle's novels are about ordinary yobs who spend their lives in one place and watch too much television. Most of his adults have jobs or houses to take care of or wish they did. Income-wise, they're 20th-to-40th percentile—virtually middle-class at their peak, but more likely to slip than climb, although the young may rise via education and bohemia (or get wasted by misery and drugs). The welcome surprise is that Doyle doesn't believe his characters are what is called "culturally

impoverished." His genius is to construct a vernacular that does justice to the humor, empathy, resilience, savor, curiosity, and moral discrimination of their unexpectedly rich lives.

Not that Doyle has chosen to sustain the inspired optimism of *The Commitments* and *The Snapper*. The Booker Prize-winning *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* is at once a minutely rendered childhood memoir and the sad tale of how one bright lad withdraws as his parents rip apart. *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* attacks a still grimmer theme—even, perhaps, a Social Problem. Audaciously, Doyle assumes the voice of 39-year-old Paula Spencer—charwoman, single mother, alcoholic, battered wife. Never long on plot or structure (both *Paddy Clarke* and *The Van*, 300-pages where the others are 200, slow down in the middle), he jumbles her story the way she

might, beginning a year after a climax in which she routs her husband with the oversized frying pan her mother-in-law gave her, and continuing a year past that. Three brutal chapters toward the end—40 pages that stick with you like the taste of bad meat—contain nothing but abuse, 17 years of it, sometimes in sentences and paragraphs that seem to repeat of their own accord, beyond the control of narrator or author.

Typically for Doyle, however, half the book describes Paula's heppier (and funnier) life before Charlo started hitting her. Unlike the earlier novels' Jimmy Rabbitte, Sr., who knows exactly what he likes in a cup of tea or a scene from Cocktail, Paula's command of detail isn't always acute, but she homes in on the interpersonal, and the rules she devises to keep her alcohol addiction off the backs of her three remaining kids (the fourth's a heroin addict out in the world) are intricate and effective. Poverty grinds harder here than in Jimmy Rabbitte's tract-house Berrylown—Paula can't believe her luck when she finds a Danielle Steel in the trash she's emptying. Yet she's undefeated, and while it may take more than a frying pan to scare off most batterers, there's nothing pat about the resolve she achieves after she gets rid of Charlo—or about the love that still complicates her loathing. Roddy Doyle has the decency to understand that the most constrained human life is never simple, and the grace and guts to prove how unimpooverished the countless meanings of that truth can be. ☺



Touching from a Distance:
Ian Curtis and Joy Division
By Deborah Curtis
Faber and Faber

Ian Curtis killed himself in the home of his wife, Deborah, in 1980, having already largely abandoned her for a mistress. So, Joy Division outlives, prepare yourself for vignettes like this: "One night he turned his back on me in bed once too often. I bit into his back in desperation. Shocked by the faint tinge of blood in my mouth, I was rewarded by being kicked onto the floor." Mrs. Curtis doesn't remember a legendary rocker, only a poseur bohemian—sexually possessive, politically conservative, a Bowie Boy with teen suicidal tendencies. Which makes for a juicier, perhaps more universal story. Then artist Ian gets the final word: 50-plus pages of lyrics and unpublished writings.


ERIC WEISSBARD

Rolling the R's
By R. Zamora Linmark
Kaya Production

In his first book, R. Zamora Linmark, a young Filipino-Hawaiian short-story writer, spins tales of religion-damaged, queer-addicted, love-starved straight and queer high schoolers in a style that combines the comic pitch of a drag queen with crazed, daredevil experimental techniques unseen since the '60s heyday of Terry Southern and Hunter Thompson—all in a dense and startlingly beautiful pidgin dialect. There are stories in the form of monologues, plays, a book report, a chain letter, an episode of *Dance Fever*. Linmark nails the excitement and terror of being young with a rare and moving accuracy.

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TALKED OUT

continued from page 75

the other end of the lot, the studios of WWOR, where fans line up for *The Richard Bey Show* five days a week.

Today's minyan began forming at 3:30. When the doors finally open at five, 100 ticketholders walk through a metal detector and wait again, this time indoors, in a hallway lined with photos of those whom WWOR, New York's UPN Channel 9, considers its stars: a local weatherman, one of those alien lumpy-heads from *Star Trek Voyager*, and Bey.

If anyone's annoyed by the excessive waitage, all hostility is defused by the sudden fleshly appearance of said star. In a snap-brim hat, jeans, blazer, and way-polite black cowboy boots, Bey cups a Marlboro Light as he heads for the front of the line. He wades through the throng, methodically shaking every hand proffered and some that aren't, posing for pictures when requested. A woman nuzzles a hug. "I need this more than you do," he offers. "This is my third show today." Then, with as much weary sincerity as irony, he adds, "But now I'm meeting the people, and I'm feeding off your energy."

When we're ushered into the studio proper, the cameras are older, the staff smaller, and the taped music cobwebbed—En Vogue's "You're Never Gonna Get It." The set is dinner-theatrical, like an amateur opera company's, an archway topped with a "B" in a coat of arms, and a stairway down to the stage. But up in the audience, the seats are the plushiest yet. And we get a warm-up from the headline act.

He teaches us to cheer. "That was almost loud enough to make Jerry Springer turn down his hearing aid. But I need more. I need your energy." When Bey tells us we can ask questions of, offer support to, or criticize guests, he says, "Somehow, with this audience, I think you'll choose to criticize." He retires backstage.

His official, on-camera entrance, minutes later, is stupefying. Dashing in front of the lens at stage left, he does a manic, booted jig for a full 15 seconds, while the audience barks, whoots, and claps. His scripted intro is dangerously breathless. The 'Boros have done their job.

At first the topic du jour seems like the same high-minded pap that aired on *Ricki* the Monday afternoon I spent with Angela Viggiano in her living room 120 miles away. We're going to learn how to parent. But Bey's child-rearing clinic is called "I Don't Like the Way You're Raising Your Kids," and he's procured several worthy hate magnets. Thomas wants to raise his sons like "good little Marines," and teach them that all women are bitches. If the kids see a checkout clerk with big breasts, they're taught to growl, "Bounce 'em for me!" One of the boys told his teacher, "Bitch, you sit in the time-out chair!"

The audience jumps all over Thomas. A slight, dark-haired female producer holds up a blue cardboard sign with a handwritten message to Tom's harried wife: You're GOING TO LEAVE HIM! Mrs. Tom delivers the appropriate threat. Bey piles on with a Freud impersonation, Viennese accent included. For the first time in my talk history I feel a burning need to ask a question. I genuinely want to know if Tom is a bust in the bedroom.

In the next segment, Kathy tells her friend Erica to stop hanging around with her boyfriend's band and take care of her daughter. Erica leaves the child with an aunt so she can spend more QT rocking with Demolition Pit. The producer flashes Kathy: SHE DRINKS TOO MUCH. Bey thinks that when the little girl grows up, she's going to want to be in a band, too. "And you know what she's going to be singing?" Bey turns to the camera, grabs an air guitar, and starts to shriek: "My mother left me when I was three / And now I have long hair and you can see / And I'm angry at the whole world / Because I was never a little girl." Cut to commercial.

Bey has killed. He's killed us deadlier than Pat Cooper ever slew Caesar's. Kathy, Thomas, and the others who've been scorched by Bey and his chorus of 100 clap along to the interstitial music, happy, excited, apparently unhurt.

The final guests don't need the blue signs that say LOUDER and Go CRAZY. Rico shows his kids dirty movies. His wife disapproves. A nerdy crew-cut male producer gives her the thumbs-up when she leaves her chair to fingerwig Rico into silence.

On *Ricki*, the expert who appears to assess the guests' ills and prescribe solutions might be a shrink, a social worker, or the author of an airport-rack self-help book. On *Bey*, the authority who closes the show is a riot act. In Afrocentric mumum and headwrap, "Mother Teresa" descends the staircase and walks to a podium. She's had 11 children and 18 grandchildren, hence the expertise. She warns Thomas he's prepping his kids for special ed, orders Erica to give up her child, and threatens Rico with legal action, since exposing kids to porno qualifies as molestation. The mob erupts: "Whooot, there it is!"

Bey says, "I have no children, you are my children."

After the host and Mother Teresa and the whole dysfunctional battle royal have left the building, the director still needs a few more minutes with the studio audience for some bogus reaction shots. We do a little applause, then several minutes of shocked faces, giggling as the director mugs us onward. We do another round of applause. We're all actors, enjoying our instantly disposable brush with fame.

Afterwards I'm completely spent. I could barely do this once a day, let alone three times. But when we finally exit the studio, into a misty Jersey winter night, Bey is ready for us, standing at the door, willing to face the fleshbush, weather the hugs, and shake every last head once again. No one mutters, "Boring." ●

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JOAN OSBORNE

she volunteered as a clinic escort, helping women seeking abortions make their way through pro-life blockades. So there, Rush, "I've had holy water thrown on me," she says. "I've been called an instrument of Satan."

She offers a pretty satisfying answer in the dressing room after the Cologne show. Squatting on her haunches, running her fingers through her scalp, she's not too happy about how things went. The crowd was too cold and unresponsive for her liking. "It's my job," she says, shaking her head. "It's my job to captivate the audience, to get this connection going back and forth. Otis Redding was amazing at that. It's like the Holy Grail." Joan Osborne needs to make her music a sacrament to be shared in public, between one flesh-and-blood being and another. If she can't do that on VH1, or on her records, there are always other nights and other shows. There are hills to swing, and the work of both God and the Devil to be done. ●

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The Kids Aren't Alright

Former teen idol Paul Peterson on the so-called life of child TV stars.

SPIN: You were on *The Donna Reed Show* for most of your adolescent life. What was it like playing Jeff Stone, the son of the most understanding parents on television?

Peterson: Understand that Carl Betz, who played my dad, and Donna Reed came to the show aware of the situation with *Father Knows Best*, where Robert Young [the father] was an alcoholic, and Lauren Chapin ["Kitten"] and Billy Gray ["Bud"] were arrested for drugs. Carl and Donna made a commitment to befriend and be loyal to their TV kids; namely, Shelley Fabares and me.

Do you think it's a form of child abuse to push kids into the profession at all?

Well, it's close, given that the setup is patently unfair. After *The Donna Reed Show*, I realized that what I'd learned was of no value whatsoever. So what if you know how to hit marks and memorize your lines. What do you want to be when you grow up? I started on that show when I was 12 and finished when I was 20, and in all those years no one once asked me that question. **But it must have been kind of a ball when it was happening.**

It was wonderful. I had race cars, I dated three or four women a day. Then I got a bill. First, I didn't fit in with my contemporaries anymore. Then my liver handed me a bill. What was awful was that I was surrounded by more mature people who knew what was going to happen.

And they just watch it like a movie.

I don't mind that people on the outside do it. But it bothers me that people in the industry do nothing about it. That's why a number of us former child stars have started an organization, *A Minor Consideration*, to help these kids. Because we remember what it was like when our friends were in trouble and nobody was there to help them.

I guess one of those friends was Rusty Hamer, the son of *The Danny Thomas Show*. Rusty was one of three kid stars who killed themselves in a three-month period that led directly to the formation of our group. Tim Hovi, who was in a lot of movies, hanged himself on the elementary-school fence where he was taken from school to be an actor. And Trent Lehman from *Please Don't Eat the Daisies* hanged himself in his garage right before his kids came home from school; he had arranged the garage door to keep doing the open-and-close, open-and-close.



Teen angel: Paul Peterson and a photo of his paradise lost.

Jeez, once an actor, always an actor.

And then Rusty put a .357 Magnum with his head in a house trailer in Louisiana. The morning Rusty killed himself I said, that's it. We started right then. **What exactly does *A Minor Consideration* do?** We try to help kids protect their money. We make on-set visits to ensure that the rules are being followed. But most important, since acting careers rarely last more than five years, we help smooth the transition from a working kid actor to a functioning adult.

Do any child actors ever come to you without their parents and say, "I need help?" Sure. We have arranged counseling sessions, encounter sessions; I mean, if we can walk into people's lives like River Phoenix.... **I heard you tried to perform an intervention on him. He must have been somewhat, uh, horrified.**

I tried to help him. We went to his house and River says, "What do you mean heroin? I don't even eat

meat." As if the two were connected. And then to read that even his brother was so buffaloeed by his fame, that he couldn't even say to the paramedics who came, "Oh, by the way, he's been doing heroin." If the entertainment industry cared that heroin deaths are up 300 percent among kids, he wouldn't have been in that trouble.

But why should it be any harder for an ex-child actor as opposed to any other adult actor? They are continually being singled out. I'll give an example. Transvestite prostitutes are beaten every day in the United States, but when the person doing the beating is Danny "Partridge"

Bonaduce, it's headlines. **Let's move on to '80s television. What was it about the show *Diff'rent Strokes* that led everyone down the road to ruin?** Well now, don't paint with too broad a brush. Gary Coleman has not been tainted by scandal. It was his parents and managers who robbed him. Todd Bridges and Dana Plato are another story entirely. There were tremendous competitive dynamics on that set that were based on Gary Coleman—this kidney-less midget was the star and everybody else was second fiddle. Eventually, Todd and Dana turned to drugs. **What's happened to Emmanuel Lewis?** I haven't seen him on *Michael Jackson's* lap lately.

The industry must understand that if it is going to hire children with obvious handicaps it has a special obligation to provide aftercare. What did people think was going to happen when they hired a diminutive

black boy who they knew would not grow?

Well, television is a freak show.

Right. But it can be lethal when you do that to a child. Childhood, whatever happens to you, is simply preparation for an adulthood. And parents that trade off a successful childhood for an adulthood at risk are fools.

Speaking of lethal experiences, you were a *Mouseketeer* once, weren't you?

I was fired after three weeks. I punched the casting agent—this big fat man—in the stomach because he continued to call me a Mouse.

I said, "Don't call me that, f---." I got home that afternoon and was told I was "discharged."

I didn't even know what the word meant. Last question: Any advice for young hopefuls who dream of being the next Macaulay Culkin?

I'd say pick your parents with care. Show-business parents are like rabbits on a highway: Bright lights blind them. ■



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